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**The Codes of Modesty:  
Reconfiguring the *Muslim Female Subject***

**by**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## ABSTRACT

This study addresses the relationship between the *veil* and the constitution of what I have termed the *Muslim female subject* in the field of visual and popular culture, with a special emphasis on film. My case-studies range from European historical texts to contemporary visual culture and social practices with reference to the Middle East. The study draws on postcolonial and feminist literature to explore the productions of the *Muslim female subject* within the discourses of (post)colonialism, nationalism and Islamic patriarchy. It examines the *Muslim female subject* in relation to the paradigms of *veiling* and *unveiling* in a cross-cultural yet context-specific differentiated analysis. The aim is to interrogate the mobility of the *veil* and the manner in which it can be evaded, substituted or transferred without transgressing the codes of Islamic female modesty. It identifies different manifestations of the *veil*'s mobility, which I contend challenge Islamic hegemonic discourses whilst simultaneously transcending the colonialist paradigm of *unveiling*.

The material I discuss ranges from (de-)colonial cinematic texts, Iranian cinema and advertising for Saudi Arabian Television. I look at canonical texts such as Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and Abbas Kiarostami's *10* (2002) in view of their significance in scholarship relating to the *Muslim female subject* within film studies. I also examine manifestations of the *veil* in the field of fashion and make extensive reference to paradigmatic representations of the *Muslim female subject* in contemporary art and curatorial projects.

## For Mohammed

Often the transgression of a taboo is no less subject to rules than the taboo itself. No liberty here. “At such and such a time and up to a certain point this is permissible” — that is what the transgression concedes. But once a limited licence has been allowed, unlimited urges towards violence may break forth. The barriers are not merely raised, for it may even be necessary at the moment of transgression to assert their solidity. Concern over a rule is sometimes at its most acute when that rule is being broken, for it is harder to limit a disturbance already begun.

— Georges Bataille

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## **DECLARATION**

I certify that all the material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

## **A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION**

Throughout this thesis I adopt a simplified version of the transliteration system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, avoiding the use of dots above and below letters.



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## **‘A Real Nurse Would Understand That Instinctively. Or She Should’: Reconfiguring the *Muslim Female Subject* and the Pursuit of Political Intervention<sup>1</sup>**

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In June 2006 I met with Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Ibn Mohammed Al-Mutlaq, an affiliate of the Board of Senior *‘Ulamā* (Muslim clergy) and member of The Permanent Committee for Religious Research and *Fatwā*, at his home in Al-Riyadh.<sup>2</sup> Although at the time of our meeting I was unfamiliar with Al-Mutlaq’s work within the *Majlis Al-Shūrā* (Consultative Assembly) of Saudi Arabia, I was aware of a decree he had issued regarding women’s modest clothing in an article I had read in the Saudi newspaper *Al-Watan*, which had left me intrigued. Here, he briefly explained that he approved of women who work in hospitals in Saudi Arabia replacing the *‘abāyah* (Islamic national dress in the Arab Gulf States) with medical lab coats in indoor hospital spaces, since in essence they function similarly in ‘concealing woman.’<sup>3</sup> According to Al-Mutlaq, the lab coat continues to uphold the concept of *sitr* (concealment/modesty in dress) and consequently prevents the occurrence of *fitnah* (transgression).<sup>4</sup>

Whilst I was primarily interested in this argument for the way it relates to the relationship between Islamic female modesty and dress, I was further drawn to the lab coat debate by the fact that it reveals the complexities inherent in the concept of *sitr* itself and the ways in which the notion of Islamic female modesty can potentially be manifested. Crucially, although this debate is executed with reference to indoor spaces, it nonetheless provides a case in which institutionalized forms of



dress that are enforced by patriarchal hegemony, such as the '*abāyah*, can be substituted with clothing that functions in a similar manner to the *veil*, in Al-Mutlaq's words, in 'concealing woman.'<sup>5</sup>

The lab coat debate forms part of a wider discussion concerning the way nurses in Saudi Arabian hospitals are expected to adhere to a dress code prescribed by the Ministry of Interior Affairs. An article by Sommaya Jabarti from the Saudi website *Arab News*, entitled 'No High-Heels for Saudi Nurses,' explains how the administration for Health Affairs 'has directed that Saudi nurses on duty are not permitted to wear jewelry, high-heels and make-up.'<sup>6</sup> Jabarti quotes a gynaecologist working in a public hospital in Riyadh, who states, 'there's nothing really wrong with nurses wearing jewelry or make-up in moderation.'<sup>7</sup> He adds, 'But a nurse in high-heels? That's out of the question. A real nurse would understand that instinctively. Or she should.'<sup>8</sup>

Jabarti writes that, according to the Saudi newspaper *Al-Madinah*, 'the decision was made after the administration observed Saudi nurses wearing unsuitable and unprofessional clothing,' and that nurses who did not follow the new dress code would be punished. She further explains how the Ministry of Interior Affairs instructed 'female employees in public and private hospitals and in medical units' to 'wear clothes that were modest, appropriate for their job in accordance with *Shariah* [*sic*] (the canonical law of Islam),' that is, 'covering the head and hair in non-transparent and undecorated cloth as well as not wearing tight or transparent garments with indecent pictures or words counter to the teachings of Islam.'<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, Jabarti states that the Ministry ‘prohibited the wearing of jeans at the same time as wearing surgical clothing in hospital corridors’; that ‘gold and jewelry, besides a watch and a ring, are not allowed’; and that accessories, nail polish and make-up are also ruled out.<sup>10</sup> It is required that, ‘lab coats must not be shorter than half-leg length and that sleeves must be long.’<sup>11</sup>

I had intended to meet with Al-Mutlaq to discuss the lab coat debate and thereby interrogate the complex relationship between conceptions of Islamic female modesty and institutionalized forms of dress. The religious scholar and I did not get very far with our planned interview, however, and an opportunity for further discussion on the subject was not offered. During our meeting, Al-Mutlaq was increasingly suspicious of the focus of my research and clearly signaled his disapproval of my thesis being written in English. After questioning why I wanted to deconstruct the *Muslim female subject* and before concluding our meeting prematurely, he insisted, ‘that it were best, if she – the *Muslim female subject* – were left alone.’<sup>12</sup>

### ***The Muslim Female Subject as a Critical Category***

The concept of the *Muslim female subject* emerged as a result of my research on the *veil* in the field of visual and popular culture.<sup>13</sup> As shall be demonstrated presently and throughout this study, this concept is here proposed as a theoretical necessity for both establishing and foregrounding a female subjectivity and identity that exists independently of the *veil*. Within Western academic scholarship a consistent feature in *veil* literature has been a consideration of the *veil*’s origins with the aim of

situating the practice of *veiling* historically and challenging the misconception that it is a purely Islamic phenomenon.<sup>14</sup> Whilst I recognize that this practice is embedded in a wider historical and regional context, predating Islamic civilization, this study takes *veiling* and its institutionalization as a product of Islamic ideology as its point of departure.<sup>15</sup>

Within the Islamic discursive field, a recurrent concern in relation to the *veil* is the fact that there exists no direct commandment regarding the *hijāb* (*veil*) in the *Qur-ān* and the *Hadīth* (the reported sayings and deeds of the Prophet). The two *Qur-ānic* verses cited to support the notion of Islamic female modesty, dress and behavioural codes are *Al-Ahzāb* (33:53, 59) and *Al-Nūr* (24:30, 31).<sup>16</sup> Here, two sartorial references that are deemed responsible for the institutionalization of the *veil* relate to *jilbāb* (a long gown or a loose shirt-dress) in *Al-Ahzāb* and to *khimār* (a head *veil* which women are commanded to draw over their *zīnah*, or adornments) in *Al-Nūr*.<sup>17</sup> Whilst these references continue to be employed to validate the institutionalization of *veiling*, they are simultaneously subject to counter-interpretations that contest the implementation of the *hijāb* within Islamic thought.<sup>18</sup> Taking this interpretative ambivalence into consideration, and acknowledging the fact that the *Muslim female subject* is not solely defined by the *veil*, but by other considerations such as modesty in conduct and the preservation of virginity to name but two, for the purpose of my analysis the concept of the *Muslim female subject* is employed to signify the maintenance of Islamic female modesty as upheld through dress. In short, the concept of the *Muslim female subject* exists at a level of abstraction and thus



establishes a relationship between the female subject and Islamic codes of modesty (through dress) independently of the *veil*.

Pertinent to my formulation of the *Muslim female subject* is the argument concerning the frequent rendition of Islam as a unitary, undifferentiated and monolithic concept, which has garnered extensive criticism.<sup>19</sup> In this context, I draw upon what Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon categorizes in *The Production of the Muslim Woman: Negotiating Text, History and Ideology* as ‘the “Muslim woman,”’ proposing that the *Muslim female subject* is likewise ‘a semiotic subject ... who is constituted through previous discourses, but who is historically situated.’<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, in the ensuing chapters of this study I adopt a context-specific differentiated analysis to consider varying regions as case studies, yet I nonetheless acknowledge the discursive structures in which the *Muslim female subject* is both instituted and produced.<sup>21</sup> My alignment of texts from different political and regional contexts, constitutes what Lisa Lowe, in *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* defines as ‘heterotopicality,’ to refer to ‘the continual yet uneven overlappings, intersections and collusions of discursive articulations.’<sup>22</sup> Whilst the *veil* and the *Muslim female subject* remain the subject of concern throughout this study, I employ a differentiated analysis with reference to each case in hand so as to avoid the cultural reductionism of reifying the *veil* and rendering the *Muslim female subject* an apolitical category that is formed by a unified subordination.<sup>23</sup>

Feminist scholars have repeatedly challenged the perception that the category of ‘woman’ constitutes a unified and pre-defined group.<sup>24</sup> The rendition of the ‘Muslim

woman' as a unitary concept and site for analysis is fraught by an unmistakably essentialist slant, with the effect that terms such as 'the Eastern woman' and 'the Muslim woman' are deployed as categories for analysis within varying disciplinary fields.<sup>25</sup> I would argue that methodologies concerned with 'Muslim women' as products of texts (cinematic, photographic, national discourse, and so on) ought to be situated with reference to the critical category of 'the subject,' in this instance understood to constitute a linguistic category, so as not to foreclose an understanding of the condition of woman in her lived reality.<sup>26</sup>

I am herein indebted in this formulation to Judith Butler, who argues that the subject 'ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a place-holder, a structure in formation.'<sup>27</sup> Thus, whilst it is crucial to acknowledge the existence of the *Muslim female subject* as a lived subjectivity, the conceptual term here becomes, as Butler describes it, 'the linguistic occasion for the individual to achieve and reproduce intelligibility, the linguistic condition of its existence and agency.'<sup>28</sup> The *Muslim female subject* as a linguistic category is, therefore, constituted *a priori* since, as Butler contends, individuals come to inhabit the site of the subject and thereby 'enjoy intelligibility only to the extent that they are, as it were, first established in language.'<sup>29</sup>

### ***The Muslim Female Body and the Mobility of the Veil***

In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon writes that the 'body of the young Algerian woman, in traditional society, is revealed to her by its coming to maturity and by the veil.'<sup>30</sup> Zayzafoon deems this assertion a 'patriarchal claim' that renders the *veil* 'a

constitutive element of the Algerian woman's "corporeal pattern."<sup>31</sup> By contrast, in *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, Meyda Yeğenoğlu reads Fanon's observation as drawing our attention 'to one of the most striking instances of the cultural violence of colonialism,' and argues that it 'is because [the Algerian woman's] mature female body is made by the veil that unveiling her is not simply an uncovering, or change of dress, but *peeling her skin off*.'<sup>32</sup>

Yeğenoğlu insists that the *veil* must not be seen as 'something that is external to the identity of Muslim women, but as a fundamental piece conjoined with the embodied subjectivity of Muslim woman.'<sup>33</sup> Building on the Derridean reading of the hymen, she argues that the *veil* in relation to the body can be understood in a similar light, that is, having 'the structure of *and/or*, between *and* and *or*.'<sup>34</sup> Yeğenoğlu thus contends,

In the ambiguous position it occupies, the veil is not outside the woman's body. Nor is she the interior that needs to be protected or penetrated. *Her body is not simply the inside of the veil: it is of it; 'she' is constituted in (and by) the fabric-ation of the veil.* Being an undecidable text-ile, the veil interweaves the woman's skin with its threads; as the sign of fusion it stitches together the epidermus of woman with cultural codings. It is both her identity and her difference, or it is what makes her identity different. The veil is that which produces woman, or difference; it is spacing, *différance*.<sup>35</sup>

Significantly, Fanon's account is executed within the colonial context of Algeria and, consequently, in light of the colonial doctrine of assimilation. Thus, whilst, as Zayzafoon suggests, it is problematic to describe the *veil* as intrinsic to the body,



Fanon's observation nonetheless presents the discursive structure through which the *Muslim female body* has predominantly become known, as Yeğenoğlu argues, as 'the interior that needs to be protected or penetrated.' It is in this light, therefore, that she emphasizes that the *veil* 'differs from a simple cover that has an inside and an outside,' with the result that 'its "function" cannot be captured by such categorical oppositions.'<sup>36</sup> It is here important to define my constitution of the term the *Muslim female body* as referring to the discursive relationship between the female body and the *veil*. This constitution is posited in a similar conceptual order to that of the *Muslim female subject* in that it exists at a level of abstraction and does not, therefore, imply the *veiled* or modest female body in its materiality. However, whilst my constitution of the *Muslim female subject* serves to signify the maintenance of Islamic female modesty autonomous to the *veil*, the *Muslim female body* refers to the female body as a discursive effect and site that is produced, constituted and articulated by and through the *veil*.

Yeğenoğlu's reading of the *veil* as clothing contributes to *veil* scholarship primarily through her conceptualization of the *veil*/hymen analogy, which resists reifying the *veil* to the exclusion of the *Muslim female body* in a way that is repeatedly demonstrated by the numerous textual responses to the *veil* examined throughout this study. Whilst this analogy offers the relationship between the *veil* and the body as a discursive site within the context of colonialism, it nonetheless fails to recognize the conceptual and discursive dynamic between the ideological dimension of the *veil* and its relation to the *Muslim female body*. In other words, whilst the notion of an ambiguity between the body and the *veil* is clearly manifest in her argument, a

rendition of the *veil* as clothing must acknowledge the manner in which the *veil* simultaneously adopts the state of non-dress, since its essence ideologically demands, as Al-Mutlaq notes, the ‘concealment’ of the female body itself. Hence, the *veil* as *différance* can be further understood, for the material *and/or* ideological status of the *veil* in relation to the *Muslim female body* is herein rendered, as Derrida writes, ‘an operation that *both* sows confusion *between* opposites *and* stands *between* the opposites “at once.”’<sup>37</sup>

In *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, Fadwa El Guindi establishes the rendition of the *veil* as clothing through what she describes as an ‘anthropological framework developed for a cross-cultural analysis of dress.’<sup>38</sup> Aligning the *veil* with women’s privacy, El Guindi conducts her argument through an etymological and spatial approach to the *veil*, in which she suggests that women’s privacy is manifested in ‘dress, space, architecture and proxemic behavior.’<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it could be said that the conceptualization of the *veil* as a visual metaphor for segregation, privacy or invisibility has developed into a dominant paradigm for understanding the *veil* in its ideological and social dimensions. This approach is substantiated, amongst other sources, through the interpretations of the *Qur-ānic* verses cited earlier and an etymological study of the linguistic roots of the Arabic terms *satr* and *hijāb*.<sup>40</sup> Whilst such interpretations offer an understanding of the *veil* on a metaphysical level and place it in its etymological and scriptural context, these renditions not only engender the categorical compositions which Yeğenoğlu outlines, but also constitute intangible manifestations of the *veil*. In so doing, they fail to acknowledge that the *Muslim female body* that is invested by the *veil* constitutes a site of discursivity.

As Yeğenoğlu notes, feminist theorists have advocated the importance of a material conception of the body and underlined the effects of post-structuralism within feminist discourse through their emphasis on the body as ‘an effect of historically specific technologies of power.’<sup>41</sup> Following this, she proposes that if *veiling* ‘can be seen as a specific practice of marking and disciplining the body in accordance with cultural requirements, so can unveiling’:

the practice both of veiling and unveiling are culturally specific procedures of corporeal inscriptions, conditioned by specific cultural histories. What needs to be examined here is the presumption of the truth and naturalness of the unveiled body that the discourse of colonial feminism is predicated upon ... the unveiled body is no less marked or inscribed; rather a whole battery of disciplinary techniques and practices have produced Western women’s bodies and therefore not-to-veil needs to be seen as one among many practices of corporeal inscriptions.<sup>42</sup>

This observation positions the *Muslim female body* as an effect of a power/knowledge nexus through the processes of *veiling* and *unveiling*.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the postcolonial debate and its censure of the *unveiled* body is situated with reference to a materialist conception of the body rooted in the assumption that the not-*veiled* body constitutes the universal truth of female corporeality.<sup>44</sup> Whilst Yeğenoğlu’s observation is pioneering for the manner in which it establishes an understanding of the *Muslim female body* as a historical and cultural effect of power, her analysis once again engages primarily with the discursivity of the *Muslim female body* within the context of colonialism. Whilst both *veiling* and *unveiling* are equally



exposed as disciplinary mechanisms and corporeal inscriptions, in emphasizing ‘the positioning of Muslim women’s bodies within Western representations,’ Yeğenoğlu falls short of stressing the extent to which the *Muslim female body* should also be understood as an effect of Islamic patriarchal discourse.<sup>45</sup>

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler engages at length with the Foucaultian concept of *assujettissement*, or ‘subjection,’ defined as ‘the simultaneous *forming* and *regulating* of the subject.’<sup>46</sup> She explains that for Foucault the central site in which the process of subjection becomes manifest is the body.<sup>47</sup> Thus, in *Discipline and Punish*, the prisoner’s body appears ‘framed and formed through the discursive matrix of a juridical subject.’<sup>48</sup> Underlying Foucault’s constitutions of subjectivity through power is the conviction that the dialectic of subject formation implies that the autonomous subject is both instituted in, and emerges as a result of, restriction and constraint.<sup>49</sup> As Butler notes, “‘Subjection’ signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject,’ hence her view that as a form of power it is paradoxical.”<sup>50</sup> Lois McNay explains, however, that Foucault’s thesis on the contingency and contestability of power has been widely contested, particularly for not elaborating on the particulars of resistance to power.<sup>51</sup> Butler argues that Foucault neglects to identify ‘the specific mechanisms of how the subject is formed in submission.’<sup>52</sup> To this effect, Butler considers the extent to which the transference of power entails an alteration of power, and how resistance can be thought of in terms of ‘reiteration,’ so as to establish the conditions of what she describes as ‘the ambivalent scene of agency’:

Agency exceeds the power by which it is enabled. One might say that the purposes of power are not always the purposes of agency. To the extent that the latter diverge from the former, agency is the assumption of a purpose *unintended* by power, one that could not have been derived logically or historically, that operates in a relation of contingency and reversal to the power that makes it possible, to which it nevertheless belongs. This is, as it were, the ambivalent scene of agency, constrained by no teleological necessity.<sup>53</sup>

Butler's critics regard her 'non-voluntarist' model of agency as lacking historical and social specificity and having limited efficacy within political practice.<sup>54</sup> Whilst her reformulations of agency with reference to the question of political intervention shall be addressed later in this study, in this instance I am concerned particularly with her contention regarding the alteration of power and her argument that agency operates in contingent relation to power.

As explained previously, I was drawn to Al-Mutlaq's pronouncement on the lab coat debate because it demonstrates the complexities inherent in the concept of *sitr* and provides a potential site in which Islamic female modesty could be manifested independently of the 'abāyah. Before meeting with Al-Mutlaq, however, I had intended to question him on his choice of the word *bimathābat*, which he uses with reference to a similarity between the lab coat and the 'abāyah in his article in *Al-Watan*. According to the *Al-Mawrid* dictionary, *bimathābat* translates from the Arabic into 'like,' 'as,' 'similar to,' 'tantamount to' or 'equivalent to.'<sup>55</sup> I had been particularly struck by this term for the way in which it provides and elucidates a case for the mobility of the *veil*. It is here important to define my formulation of the *veil*'s

mobility as implying the possibility of evasion or substitution. The mobility of the *veil* in this sense is situated within the context of the hegemonic institutionalization of *veiling*, and thus by extension occasions an ideological and socio-political relocation, or as I term it ‘transference,’ of the *veil*.

In light of the discovery that a lab coat could potentially constitute a manifestation of Islamic female modesty, can this transference of the *veil* perhaps be understood in terms of Derrida’s notion of supplementarity, since it embodies the operations of replacement and addition, ‘substitution and accretion’?<sup>56</sup> In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida writes,

the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself.<sup>57</sup>

Following this, what are the limits when substituting the *veil*, and how do these manifestations – *taking the place of* the *veil* – continue to uphold conceptions of Islamic female modesty so that they are rendered tantamount to (*bimathābat*) the *veil* itself? Indeed, can the *veil* ‘be filled up of itself’ such that it ‘accomplish[es] itself only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy?’



It is important to note that the Derridean supplement incorporates two meanings, being as Jonathan Culler explains at once ‘an inessential extra, added to something complete in itself,’ and something added ‘to compensate for a lack in what was supposed to be complete in itself.’<sup>58</sup> Crucially, however, Culler contends that both meanings present the supplement as ‘exterior, foreign to the “essential” nature of that to which it is added or in which it is substituted.’<sup>59</sup> As such, how are we to understand the transference of the *veil* in terms of exteriority, and to what extent does it constitute an entity ‘foreign to the essential nature’ of the *veil* itself? This in turn leads us to interrogate the distinction between the material presence of the *veil* and how the *veil* functions to uphold female modesty – that is, between its purpose and its symbolism – and thus to question the extent to which the transference of the *veil* can continue to uphold codes of female modesty and resist transgression. Given that the lab coat debate presents a case for the substitution of the ‘*abāyah*, albeit within the confines of indoor hospital spaces, what are we to make of this seeming evasion, and can alternative sites which replicate this effect be located? And if so, is it in fact possible for the *Muslim female subject* to exist not-veiled?

In as far as the *veil*’s mobility constitutes a removal, I intend to explore how different manifestations of this motion can run counter to the paradigm of *unveiling*. If we were to follow Butler’s insight on the Foucaultian contention that the body is to be understood as gaining meaning in discourse only within the context of power, then the paradigm of *unveiling*, as shall be demonstrated, comprises a form of epistemic violence, with the *Muslim female body* discursively reproduced ‘through recourse to a culturally imperialist notion of the “universal.”’<sup>60</sup> This being the case,

to what extent can the removal of the *veil* resist appropriating the epistemological connotations inherent in *unveiling*? Indeed, this study seeks to transcend articulating the *Muslim female body* through the corporeal inscriptions of *veiling* and *unveiling* that have hitherto comprised its discursive formation, demonstrating how such renditions are pernicious in effect, and thereby endeavours to situate the *Muslim female body* outside these processes. Finally, given that the implementation of *veiling* constitutes a form of subordination, this study examines productions of the *Muslim female subject* in light of Butler's analysis of autonomy and submission in her formulation of subjection. In this context, it examines whether the realignment of power engendered by the transference of the *veil* can be deemed a site of resistance, and, if so, how this effect gives rise to the conditions of agency which operate in a contingent relation to power. Reconfiguring the *Muslim female subject* involves attempting to understand how the subject can be represented independently of the *veil*, whilst continuing to uphold the codes of modesty and resisting transgression. In short, it questions the extent to which the *veil* can be detached from the *Muslim female subject* within the structures of *veil* discourse.

As a differentiated analysis that makes reference to varying media and regions as situated contexts, this study ranges from historical canonical European texts to Middle Eastern visual culture. In view of the impossibility of covering material from the entire Muslim world, I have chosen texts which either dominate discussion in film studies and *veil* scholarship or provide examples of the *veil*'s mobility. I consider Algeria as a situated context, on account for its paradigmatic significance of the Algerian colonial narrative in *veil* discourse. Canonical texts such as Fanon's



‘Algeria Unveiled’ and Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* are central to my analysis, though they remain context-specific with reference to my overarching methodology. Iran and the Arab Gulf States are considered because of the legal and social enforcement of *veiling* in these countries. The formation of gendered subjectivities when regulated by Islamic national discourses and the institutionalizations of modesty in film and television offers an appropriate site for an analysis of the *veil*’s mobility with reference to the maintenance of modesty codes.

Chapters One and Two are primarily concerned with the paradigm of *unveiling*. In Chapter One I establish this paradigm with reference to the postcolonial debate on the *veil*. My analysis examines the question of female agency in the cinematic texts of Julien Duvivier’s *Pépé Le Moko* (1937) and Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). Whilst it looks at two cinematic narratives from different periods of film history, namely colonial and de-colonial, it remains within the situated context of Algeria. Within the context of *veil* scholarship, I engage with the colonial narrative of the *veil* and the Orientalist paradigm of the *Muslim female subject* from which it is engendered, followed by the derivative narrative formed by nationalist discourse. This chapter provides the historical discursive context of the *veil* in the (de-)colonial project with a view to examining the manner in which the *Muslim female subject* is produced through the paradigm of *unveiling*.

Chapter Two continues to examine the relationship between the *veil* and cinematic narrative. It assesses the role of the *veil* in the articulation of gender with reference

to Islam and explores how the *Muslim female subject* is produced as a result. The cinematic texts I consider include Marziyeh Meshkini's *The Day I Became a Woman* (2000) and Samira Makhmalbaf's *At Five in the Afternoon* (2004). In this instance, the paradigm of *unveiling* is situated within the context of a feminist appropriation of imperialist rhetoric and ideology. The main aim of this chapter is to question the manner in which the *veil* is rendered the primary site of signification in representations of the *Muslim female subject* and the articulation of gender with reference to Islam.

Chapters Three and Four, by contrast, are concerned with the mobility of the *veil* and are situated within the context of contemporary *veiling* practices. Chapter Three considers censorship regulations in Iranian cinema, and Chapter Four examines the legal and social implementation of *veiling* in Islamic national discourse in the Arab Gulf States. Chapter Three looks at the evasion of the *veil* through its replacement with the shaved head and through costume substitution, and examines the relationship between the maintenance of modesty and resistance to transgression within the parameters set by censorship and the institutionalization of modesty on screen. My analysis primarily engages with one scene from Abbas Kiarostami's *10* (2002), yet also make reference to Mariam Shahriar's *Daughters of the Sun* (2000). The paradigm of *unveiling* and the *Muslim female body* continue as sites for analysis, yet are here considered in the context of the mobility of the *veil*. This chapter therefore interrogates the way in which productions of the *Muslim female subject* are legitimized through the evasion and transference of the *veil* and the manner in which the *Muslim female body* emerges as a result.

Chapter Four is predominantly concerned with the notion of consent in relation to the mobility of the *veil*. It examines the language and tactics employed when producing the *Muslim female subject* within social and popular practices regulated by the parameters of patriarchal hegemonic discourses. I first focus on shampoo advertising for Saudi Arabian Television, where I once again examine the maintenance of modesty through the evasion of the *veil* on screen. The texts I consider in this analysis include *Pantene*, *Head and Shoulders* and *Pert Plus* (2004). I then proceed to investigate the phenomenon of the '*abāyah*-as-fashion in the Arab Gulf States in order to explore how fashion designers work within the boundaries of an institutionalized form of national dress. Amongst other visual material from women's magazines and fieldwork conducted in the region, this analysis looks at two fashion shows by the '*abāyah* fashion houses *Sweet Lady* (2003) and *Al-Mottahajiba* (2003). This chapter is concerned with the way that productions of the *Muslim female subject* relate to the ideological dissemination of Islamic national identity in the Arab Gulf States. In doing so, it questions whether such popular and social discourses conform to or resist patriarchal hegemony so as to examine how agency can be located within the structures of the *veil* and its discourses.

### **Marketing the *Veil* and the Hegemony of Western Scholarship**

It could be argued that after the events of the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 and the ensuing focus on the region, the displacement of clichés in cultural and textual practices produced in the 'West' with reference to Islam and the Middle East has developed



into a discursive paradigm of expression.<sup>61</sup> In the recent American publication *My Sister Guard Your Veil; My Brother Guard Your Eyes: Uncensored Iranian Voices*, editor Lila Azam Zanganeh explains that her intention is to ‘corrode fixed ideas and turn cultural and political clichés on their heads’ and ‘to open a series of vibrant perspectives on concealed Iranian realms.’<sup>62</sup> She purports that ‘the Islamic Republic exerts a peculiar sway on the American imagination,’ giving rise to ‘endless misconceptions.’<sup>63</sup> One contribution that attempts to defy such misconceptions is Negar Azimi’s ‘Don’t Cry for Me, America,’ which explains how Iranian artists are ‘moving past what some critics have dubbed the “poornographic” realm of arts production – that is, the circulation of images and ideas that tend to perpetuate the image of a victimized people.’<sup>64</sup> Whilst praising the Iranian artists’ Ghazel and Satrapi for ‘their ability to overcome raging clichés,’ Azimi herself succumbs to the employment of a familiar cliché, when she describes ‘a portrait of a veiled woman’ as being ‘sexy and provocative *in principle* [emphases added],’ hereby undermining her conclusion that, ‘With Iran we must ultimately leave our tidy preconceptions at the door.’<sup>65</sup> In addition, the fact that the publication as a whole addresses an audience based in the ‘West’ (in this case, America) also proves problematical. Indeed, the intent outlined in the Introduction to contest clichés surrounding the Middle East and Islam, exaggerated by the ‘misconceptions’ following the 11<sup>th</sup> September attacks, betrays a geographic and political form of centrism in its approach.

To apply this argument further, I refer to the seminal essay ‘Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,’ in which Chandra Talpade Mohanty

criticizes Foucault's power/resistance paradigm for being strategically and analytically flawed by the way it reinforces Western cultural imperialism.<sup>66</sup> In the context of 'a first/third world balance of power,' she argues, 'analyses which perpetrate and sustain the hegemony of the idea of the superiority of the West produce a corresponding set of universal images of the "third world woman," images such as the veiled woman' that exist in 'ahistorical splendor.'<sup>67</sup> This, she asserts, sets 'in motion a colonialist discourse which exercises a very specific power in defining, coding, and maintaining existing first/third world connections.'<sup>68</sup> Crucially, as Mohanty notes, this contention does not necessarily hold for those who identify themselves as 'culturally or geographically from the West,' but rather is 'implicit for anyone who uses these methods,' herein rendering them partakers in the production of ethnocentric universalism:

my argument holds for any discourse that sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, i.e., the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural Others. It is in this move that power is exercised in discourse.<sup>69</sup>

The discursive production of ethnocentric universalism which Mohanty outlines can be identified in Azimi's reading of Ghazel's and Satrapi's work as well as in her assertion that an image of 'a veiled woman is sexy in principle.' The notion of a cliché transcended or subverted inherently upholds, as her title suggests, America as its authorial subject and its implicit referent, thereby sustaining its hegemonic status with reference to Iran and maintaining first/third world connections. Analyses concerned with subverting clichés in this manner are pernicious, therefore, for the way they uphold the 'yardstick' by which 'cultural Others' are known as *the* point of

reference from which these clichés can then be transcended. The second troubling aspect of Azimi's writing demonstrates what Mohanty predicts, namely that a reading which perpetrates and sustains 'the hegemony of the idea of the superiority of the West' invariably generates universal images that exist in 'ahistorical splendor' – hence the assumption that images of the *Muslim female subject* are 'sexy in principle.' Thus, the rendition of the *Muslim female subject* as a stereotype, be it sexy, cloistered, subjugated or silent, as *the* dominant paradigm through which she is known herein upholds the superiority of the West as *the* definer of cultural others, which is symptomatic of a colonial ideology in which power is exercised in discourse.

Another paradigmatic manifestation of Mohanty's argument is exemplified in the exhibition *Fantasies of the Harem and the New Scheherazades* (2003) that was held at Barcelona's Centre of Contemporary Culture. A range of Orientalist paintings were juxtaposed with the work of contemporary female artists from the Middle East and North Africa to construct a dialogue between periods and genres. The stated intention was that the female artists, labelled the 'New Scheherazades,' represented 'active' and 'expressive' women and would overturn the clichés apparent in the portrayal of 'passive' women by the European artists, grouped together under 'Fantasies of the Harem.' To reinforce the relationship between myth and reality, two images from the same period presenting 'active' and 'passive' constructions of women were placed alongside each other: a photograph of a Turkish female pilot, *Matmazel Jan Hervu, pilote* (1922), and Matisse's *L'Odalisque au Sarouel Rouge* (1921). Mohanty's censure of the preservation of hegemony proves pertinent in this



case since an Orientalist fantasy of female passivity is rendered *the* implicit referent by which female artists from the region are defined through opposition. Moreover, an image existing in ‘ahistorical splendor’ is once again engendered where the figure of Scheherazade, arguably the most iconic heroine from Orientalist mythology, is appropriated in the classification ‘the New Scheherazades’ and rendered the ‘yardstick’ by which female artists from the region are both encoded and represented.

*Fantasies of the Harem and the New Scheherazades* is typical of the growing number of exhibitions and cultural festivals over recent years that reveal a tendency towards the homogenization of Islam and the Middle East. This tendency is principally the result of rendering geography or religion the primary point through which works are grouped together, and ‘origin,’ be it ethnic or religious, the means through which artists, writers and film directors are classified.<sup>70</sup> It could be argued that these exhibitions are necessary and strategic in the way they lend a platform to marginal voices that may otherwise be denied. These practices nonetheless predominantly remain deeply embedded in a neo-colonial discourse where the binary framework of centre/periphery and the relation between the ‘exotic’ and the ‘domestic’ are continually upheld.<sup>71</sup> Another significant predicament worth outlining in this context is the plethora of projects relating to Islam in recent years, which has led to the colloquial coinage of the term ‘Islamorama’ to encapsulate both the abundance of these discursive productions in Western institutions and the manner in which they exist as products of the global relations of late capitalism.<sup>72</sup>

Interestingly, a project entitled *Ethnic Marketing* (2002-2006) by Swiss Iranian cultural critic and curator Tirdad Zolghadr engages at length with this particular dynamic. Framed as ‘an inquiry into Euro-American xenophilia in and of itself,’ Zolghadr states that his project interrogates the proliferation of these discursive productions in its examination of ‘the emergent vicissitudes of the gradually “globalizing” art circuit.’<sup>73</sup> The ensuing exhibition which took place in Geneva (2004) and Tehran (2006) presented *Chador Package (as seen on TV)* (2003) (Figure 1.1), or ‘*the-veil-as-ready-made*,’ by Iranian artists Farhad Moshiri and Shirin Aliabadi. Consisting of a limited-edition packaged *chador*, the piece comments on the popularity and marketability of the *veil* in cultural production and its resultant commodification: hence the reference to ‘package’ in the form and title of the work itself. Within the context of the exhibition, *Chador Package* is specifically constituted as a dialogue concerning *veil* marketing with reference to the Western market, since Zolghadr explains that, ‘the target ethnicity’ in *Ethnic Marketing* ‘is the West, the Centre of the Real itself.’<sup>74</sup> He continues,

It is becoming ever more plain to see that the West is not a mere observer of globalized cultural flows, but, just as any other demanding client, actively defines the supply. Which aesthetic and intellectual strategies might be used to deal with hegemonic structures of the kind? [*sic*]<sup>75</sup>

The project’s methodological framework presents, to borrow from Mohanty, ‘the privileging of [the West] as the norm or referent,’ such that its hegemonic structures are rendered ‘the normative referent in ... a binary analytic’ which maintains that the centre determines the periphery.<sup>76</sup> However, whilst the project aims to engage with



concepts such as ‘self-othering,’ and by extension its relationship to the Western market, the emphasis on the demanding (Western) client is especially pertinent within the context of the West’s enduring fixation with the *veil*. *Chador Package*, in which the *chador* appears packaged, valued and commodified in a ‘limited-edition,’ both addresses and mocks the idea that the demand defines the supply. It therefore not only stands as a critique of the West’s abiding interest in the *veil* and its marketability in cultural practice – hence the subtitle, ‘*the-veil-as-ready-made*’ – but simultaneously addresses the artists and works that supply this demand, most specifically underlined in the caption which states ‘the first and best art product of Iran,’ with the *veil*’s promise of ‘authenticity’ to a foreign audience ironically affirmed in the words *as seen on TV*.



Figure 1.1: *Chador Package (as seen on TV)* — ‘*The-veil-as-ready-made*’ (2003)

In academic scholarship both El Guindi and Faegheh Shirazi in *The Veil Unveiled* draw attention to a significant recurring feature in the literature of the *veil*. El Guindi explains that whilst an abundance of academic publications refer to the *veil* in titles, the subject of the *veil* itself is only engaged with intermittently.<sup>77</sup> The repeated titular referencing of ‘*veil*’ by academics serves to highlight how the *veil* is employed as a



metonym for gender-related studies with reference to Islam. The potency of the word '*veil*' on a denotative level, however, is further underscored by the way its frequent usage outweighs discussion of the subject of the *veil* itself. This in turn confirms the marketability of the *veil* and the readiness of academic publishing houses to capitalize on this. In a similar vein, Shirazi explains,

Both authors and publishers have a tendency to include 'veil,' 'veiled,' or 'unveiled' as often as possible in the titles of books that discuss countries and regions in which women are known to veil, whether or not the work has anything to do with that particular article of clothing.<sup>78</sup>

That this continues to be the case, particularly in popular culture, can be illustrated in two pressing examples from recent years. The aforementioned *My Sister Guard Your Veil; My Brother Guard Your Eyes* makes only minor references to the *veil*, its intention being rather to present 'an intimate panorama of the country ... by some of Iran's most gifted writers and artists,' rendering its titular reference to the *veil* a metonym for Iran.<sup>79</sup> A similar usage is evinced in an issue of *Vogue Hommes International* (Fall/Winter 2003-4) that focuses specifically on the Middle East, featuring interviews and reports on artists, fashion designers, architects and film directors from the region (Figure 1.2). At one point it lists those considered to be 'changing our perceptions of the Middle East, and more importantly, its culture,' whether 'Muslims, Jews or Christian,' ranging from Prince Naseem to Edward Said.<sup>80</sup> The cover depicts a photograph of French boxer Brahim Asloum with the word 'Ch'adore' inscribed beneath. This caption plays on *chador*, a metonymic reference to the region, re-contextualizing it with a pun on 'J'adore,' the slogan used



famously in Christian Dior campaigns, thus re-appropriating the *chador* within the context of fashion. The magazine, however, does not engage with or make any further reference to the *chador* or the *veil*.

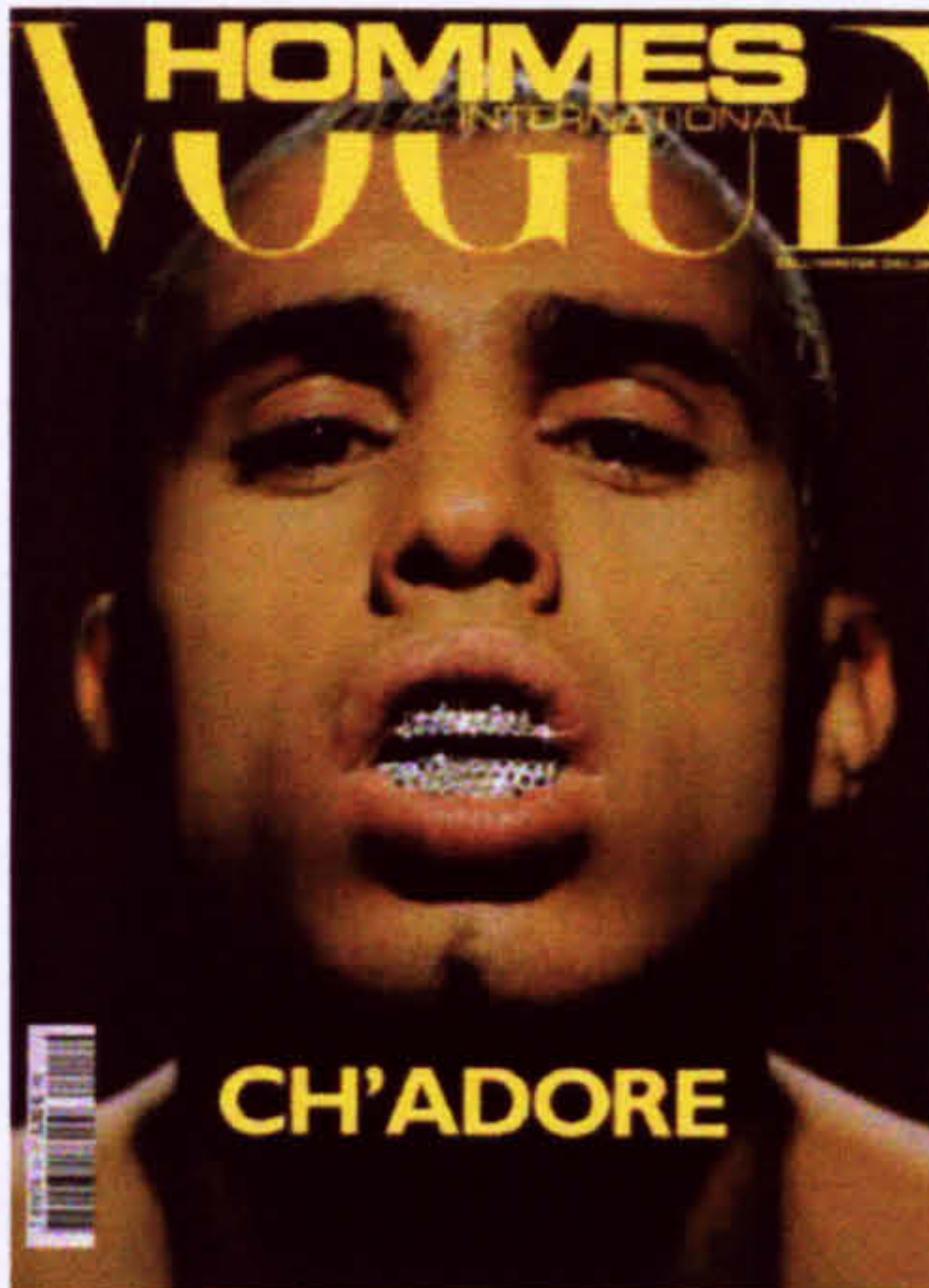


Figure 1.2: *Vogue Hommes* (2003-4)

Significantly, Shirazi and El Guindi acknowledge the marketability of the *veil* in academic scholarship, both outlining how they themselves came to employ it in their titles. Shirazi explains:

The marketing departments at university presses have apparently discovered that using the word ‘veil’ in the title or picturing a veiled woman on the cover sells books. This fact was brought home to me at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) meeting in 1998. While there, I gave a paper on Muslim images in American erotica and was approached shortly thereafter by a representative of a university press who told me that his organization might be interested in my book if I were to include the term ‘veil’ in the title. Taking his advice to heart, I decided not merely to use the word ‘veil’ in the title but to make visual, political, and literary dynamics of the veil the focus of my entire work.<sup>81</sup>



After declaring that ‘the Western word veil is “sexy” and marketable in the West and tends to be overused, invariably out of or without context,’ El Guindi comments that she initially intended to use ‘Hijab [*sic*]’ in her title, for ‘its cultural and linguistic roots that are integral to Islamic (and Arab culture) as a whole.’<sup>82</sup> She explains how, ‘for marketing reasons,’ her publishers preferred *veil* ‘for reader accessibility and familiarity’ and ‘rightly [found it] more marketable, even sexy,’ adding ‘I was not persuaded by the marketing argument.’<sup>83</sup>

Whilst Shirazi and El Guindi make a point of distinguishing themselves from others who have used the *veil* in their titles, their defence resting on the fact that they engage thoroughly with the subject of the *veil* where others do not, this stance nonetheless fails to convince. Both authors centralize and emphasize the *veil* in the artwork of their publications. With El Guindi, for example, the Afghani *burqu*’ appears in close-up (Figure 1.3). The title *Veil* stands significantly enlarged in comparison to the subtitle and the author’s name. References to the *veil* in both image and text are rendered the most dominant features of the book’s composition. This exaggerated emphasis not only validates the publisher’s interest in the *veil* for ‘marketing reasons’ but also undermines El Guindi’s insistence that she ‘was not persuaded by the marketing argument.’ A similar approach is evinced by Shirazi’s book, with references to the *veil* appearing dominant in relation to the subtitle and backdrop (Figure 1.3). In this case, however, the emphasis on the *veil* exhibited on the front cover is extended throughout her book, with a graphic illustration of a woman in a *chador* appearing alongside the titles of every chapter. This stance not only encapsulates the author’s declaration to make ‘visual, political, and literary



dynamics of the veil the focus of [her] entire work' but also demonstrates the extent to which she took the marketing advice of her academic publishers 'to heart,' endowing her references to the *veil* with an almost hyperbolic quality.



Figure 1.3: *Veil: Modesty, Privacy Resistance* (1999); *The Veil Unveiled: The Hijab in Modern Culture* (2001)

Leila Ahmed avers that, in terms of 'the Western narrative of the *quintessential otherness* and inferiority of Islam,' *veiling* was perceived as 'the most visible marker of the *differentness* and inferiority of Islamic societies [emphases added].'<sup>84</sup> Indeed, it could be argued that on a certain level *veil* marketing intersects with this ideology, namely in the way in which the denotative capacity of the *veil* is posited as the most visible marker of difference. The proliferation of the *veil* in titles and book covers not only maintains this ideological narrative but also continues to preserve the *veil* as a sign of 'otherness' both within academic institutions and through cultural production. As such, Mohanty's contention regarding the '*political effect*' of certain analytical strategies in 'the context of the hegemony of Western scholarship' sheds light on the problematics of *veil* marketing.<sup>85</sup> Feminist discourses that make reference to the 'third world,' she argues, 'must be considered in the context of the



global hegemony of Western scholarship', namely 'the production, publication, distribution, and consumption of information and ideas,' since they have 'political effects and implications beyond the immediate feminist or disciplinary audience.'<sup>86</sup>

### ***The Muslim Female Subject as the Subject of Feminism***

In *Imperial Leather* Anne McClintock indicts Fanon for denying the *veil* any role in the gender politics of Algerian society beyond its meaning within colonialism. Fanon, she explains, refuses 'the colonial desire to invest the veil with an essentialist meaning (the sign of women's servitude)' and thus upholds 'the veil's semiotic innocence in Algerian society.'<sup>87</sup> He thereby 'denies the "historic dynamism of the veil" and banishes its intricate history to a footnote,' herein displacing 'the main text with the insistent force of self-division and denial.'<sup>88</sup> As stated previously, though Fanon's thesis is valuable for having established the discursive structure of the *Muslim female body* within the political field of colonialism, it nonetheless remains deeply flawed in rendering the *veil* as an element intrinsic to Algerian female corporeality. Whilst I concur with McClintock that a situated analysis within the context of colonialism runs the risk of attributing a semiotic innocence to the *veil* (as illustrated by Yeğenoğlu's emphasis on the *Muslim female body* in the colonial project), I remain sceptical as to whether a claim for the 'essentialist meaning' of the *veil* is in fact possible and, more importantly, constructive within the political context of the hegemonic field.<sup>89</sup> Rendering the *veil* as 'the sign of women's servitude' necessitates its decontextualization, which not only entails the universalization of patriarchy and overlooks the fact that *veiling* in some instances has facilitated a hitherto denied social mobility, but moreover proves ineffectual in

as far as establishing a site for political intervention is concerned.<sup>90</sup>

In her opening pages, El Guindi declares that her book ‘is not a defense of or an attack on the veil – rather it is a scholarly effort to bring about a fuller understanding.’<sup>91</sup> This claim is problematic in that it disregards the fact that, as Mohanty has argued, academic practice is both purposeful and ideological, and ‘There can, of course, be no apolitical scholarship.’<sup>92</sup> In effect, her disavowal exposes the extent to which a study of the *veil* constitutes a political discursive practice in itself, such that there can be no apolitical *veil* scholarship. Whilst El Guindi insists on not making a specific judgement on the *veil*, she nonetheless stands accused of investing it with a semiotic innocence and glorifying it in reaction to ethnocentric biases. Nadjie Al-Ali writes,

[El Guindi’s] concluding remarks about western hysteria concerning the Taliban in Afghanistan are a sad reminder that anthropological studies of Middle Eastern women (and men) still have a long way to go before breaking out of highly ideological ‘black-and-white’ depictions. But as long as orientalist and racist accounts of oppressed Muslim women persist within western scholarship and media, there will exist reactions, which run the danger of glorifying existing cultural symbols and codes.<sup>93</sup>

During the course of writing this thesis, many such accounts of oppressed Muslim women have appeared and continue to be intensified as a consequence of the recent European debates on the *veil*.<sup>94</sup> Whilst reactions to ethnocentric biases do run the risk of undermining the subordinate conditions of the *Muslim female subject* as a lived subjectivity, it is nevertheless imperative to stress that the denigration of one



form of hegemony in a particular social field does not necessarily imply its glorification in another. It is crucial, therefore, that we identify the deployment of certain 'essentialisms' as being both strategic and political, and necessary for an intervention within the hegemonic field. It could be argued that it is not possible to assign the *veil* an essentialist meaning, or rather to categorize its historical mutability, for the *veil* is semiotically overloaded and as such does not lend itself as a site for the inscription of provenance and essential truth. Rather, we ought to acknowledge the semiotic mutability of the *veil* with reference to the various socio-political contexts in which the *Muslim female subject* is instituted, and thus interrogate the very structures in which hegemony is installed.<sup>95</sup>

Butler writes that, within the political context of contemporary postcoloniality, the category of the 'universal' ought to be rendered a site of political contest, and that it should 'be left permanently open, permanently contested, permanently contingent, in order not to foreclose in advance future claims for inclusion.'<sup>96</sup> Crucially, as she observes, 'any totalizing concept of the universal will shut down rather than authorize the unanticipated and unanticipatable claims that will be made under the sign of "the universal."<sup>97</sup> In the contemporary pursuit of political intervention, rendering the *veil* as a sign of women's servitude would be to offer it as a totalizing concept, where once again the truth of female corporeality would be reiterated under the sign of the 'universal.' This would not only inaugurate the reproduction of hegemonic power but also preclude any future claims for its mobilization.<sup>98</sup> As Butler insists, the subject of feminism is itself 'produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought.'<sup>99</sup>

Whilst the gynaecologist's assertion that 'a real nurse' should understand the inappropriateness of high-heeled shoes is based on the practicalities of the workplace, I would draw particular attention to his use of the word 'instinctively,' which is an element integral to the vocabulary through which Islamic female modesty is portrayed as inherent and unquestionable. This study is thus an attempt to reconfigure the *Muslim female subject* and to interrogate the manner in which she is discursively constituted by the structural regulations in which she is both defined and continually implicated. Butler writes that Foucault suggests 'the point of modern politics is no longer to liberate a subject, but rather to interrogate the regulatory mechanisms through which "subjects" are produced and maintained.'<sup>100</sup> Al-Mutlaq's insistence that the *Muslim female subject* be 'left alone' comprises one such hegemonic decree, one that this study advocates it necessary to challenge if these regulatory mechanisms are ever to be dismantled.

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<sup>1</sup> Somayya Jabbarti, 'No High-Heels for Saudi Nurses,' in *Arab News*, 15 September 2004 (Jiddah, Saudi Arabia). See <http://www.arabnews.com>.

<sup>2</sup> *Fatwa*: defined as a religious verdict; an authorized religious opinion; an authoritative/formal legal ruling or opinion (given by a Muslim scholar) on an issue of religious importance. Abdullah Abu-Eshy Al-Maliki and Abdullah-Latif Sheikh-Ibrahim, *A Dictionary of Religious Terms, English-Arabic Arabic-English* (Al-Riyadh: Obeikan Bookshop, 1995), pp.109–10.

<sup>3</sup> Mohammed Al-Awaji, 'The Lack of Concordance between Psychologists and Charmers makes for a Proliferation of Quacks and Charlatans,' title trans. Bilal Khbeiz and Walid Sadek, in *Al-Watan*, 6 April 2006 (Al-Riyadh). See <http://www.alwatan.com.sa/daily/2006-04-06/society/society04.htm>. All translations from Arabic in this chapter, except where indicated, are by Noura Al-Noman.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Fatima Mernissi builds on Al-Ghazali's rendition of *fitnah* as chaos, or women's power of seduction, where she renders the *veil* an entity which maintains the social order by prohibiting interaction between the sexes that violates the Muslim sexual order. Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society* (London: Al-Saqi, 1985), pp. 137–47. Whilst *fitnah* is more commonly translated as 'chaos' or 'social chaos,' I choose instead the meaning of



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'transgression' since this reinforces the sense that *Muslim female sexuality* is both regulated and contained.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that the only place in Saudi Arabia where the practice of direct mixing between the genders in the workplace can be seen openly is within the health-related sectors. See Dina Mohammad Khayat, *Female Employment in Saudi Arabia: An Analysis of the Obstacles Influencing the Employment of Saudi Females, Based on a Study of the Top 100 Companies*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Jabbarti in *Arab News*, 15 September 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Meeting I conducted with Sheikh Dr Abdullah Ibn Mohammed Al-Mutlaq on 6 June 2006, Al-Riyadh.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted at this point that when I refer to the term *veil* throughout this study it is for the sake of uniformity; however, I employ a context-specific term with reference to each case in hand. On the *veil* as a monolithic term, see El Guindi, who refers to the *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Terms*, which lists over a hundred terms for dress parts used for 'veiling.' Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> For a concise account of the debate concerning the origins of the *veil*, see 'The Veil in Comparative Tradition,' in El Guindi (1999), pp. 13–22. Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon identifies two different approaches in this context, namely that of Billie Melman, who presents the *veil* as a Christian symbol, and that of Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, who separates it from its Judeo-Christian background to render it instead an authentic Islamic cultural icon. Zayzafoon, by contrast, approaches the issue from 'a non-originary point of view.' Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman: Negotiating Text, History and Ideology* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 65–6; Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, 'The Newly Veiled Woman: Irigaray, Specularity, and the Islamic Veil,' in *Diacritics*, Volume 28, Number 1 (Spring 1998), pp. 93–119; Billie Melman, 'Transparent Veils: Western Women Dis-Orient the East,' in Patricia Yaeger, ed., *The Geography of Identity* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 433–65.

<sup>15</sup> Leila Ahmed has established that, whilst Islam did not introduce *veiling*, it was not institutionalized until it was adopted by Islam. See El Guindi (1999), p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 135. The following translations of these verses are taken from *The Koran With Parallel Arabic Text*, trans. N.J. Dawood (London: Penguin, 2000): *Al-Ahzāb* (33:53): Believers, do not enter the houses of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for the proper time, unless you are given leave. But if you are invited, enter; and when you have eaten, disperse. Do not engage in familiar talk, for this would annoy the Prophet and he would be ashamed to bid you go; but for the truth of God is not ashamed. If you ask his wives for anything, speak to them from behind a curtain. This is more chaste for your hearts and their hearts.' Ibid., p. 424. *Al-Ahzāb* (33:59): 'Prophet, enjoin your wives, your daughters, and the wives of true believers to draw their veils close round them. That is more proper, so that they may be recognized and not be molested. God is ever forgiving and merciful.' Ibid., p. 425. *Al-Nūr* (24:30–31): 'Enjoin believing women to turn their eyes away from temptation and to preserve their chastity; not to display their adornments (except such as normally revealed); to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to display their finery except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their step-sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their step-sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women-servants, and their slave-girls, male attendants lacking in natural vigour, and children who have no carnal knowledge of women. And let them not stamp their feet when walking so as to reveal their hidden trinkets. Believers, turn to God in penitence, all, that you may prosper.' Ibid., p. 352.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>18</sup> In her interpretation of *Al-Ahzāb* (33:53), Mernissi argues that the question of the *veil* first arose when it materialized in the bedroom of the Prophet on his wedding night to protect his intimacy and exclude his companion, Anas Ibn Malik. She contends that though this verse is regarded by the founders of religious knowledge as the basis of the institutionalization of the *veil*, the *veil* in fact



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descended as a barrier between two men. Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 1987), pp. 85–101. It should here be noted that the contention that the *veil* descended to protect the prophet's wives has infiltrated popular discourse which seeks to criticize the practice of *veiling*.

<sup>19</sup> For a concise analysis of Islam as a privileged paradigm and unitary concept in academic scholarship, see Marnia Lazreg, 'Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria,' in *Feminist Studies*, Volume 14, Number 1 (Spring 1988), pp. 81–107, pp. 83–9.

<sup>20</sup> Zayzafoon (2005), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,' in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, eds, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 51–80, p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> Lisa Lowe draws on Foucault's notion of 'heterotopia' in her formulation of 'heterotopicality,' which she defines as 'a heterogeneous spatial designation.' She writes, 'Foucault argues that in institutional and social practices, certain spaces are coded as "public" and others as "private," some domains "legal" and others "illegal," some areas for "work" and others for "play," and so on. He further distinguishes between cultural designations of utopias, which are the imaginary inversions of the real spaces of society, and heterotopias, which he describes as spaces of otherness: spaces of crisis, illiteracy, deviance, enslavement, or colonialism.' Lowe extends this thesis from a 'binary frame of oppositions' to an understanding of 'spatial difference in terms of multiple sites.' Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> I here draw on Mohanty's argument concerning methodological universalisms. Mohanty attacks critical approaches that equate *veiling* with the universal sexual control of women in countries where women are known to *veil*, contending that they uphold a 'universal cross-cultural operation of male dominance and female exploitation.' Mohanty (1991), p. 66. Marnia Lazreg makes a similar claim when she addresses the reductionism inherent in scholarship on women in the Middle East and North Africa: 'A ritual is established whereby the writer appeals to religion as the cause of gender inequality just as it is made the source of underdevelopment in much modernization theory. In an uncanny way, feminist discourse on women from the Middle East and North Africa mirrors that of theologians' own interpretation of women in Islam... The overall effect of this paradigm is to deprive women of self-presence, of being. Because women are subsumed under religion presented in fundamental terms, they are inevitably seen as evolving in nonhistorical time. They virtually have no history. Any analysis of change is therefore foreclosed.' Mohanty (1991), p. 62. It is here important to note that Mohanty's criticism of Eurocentric criticism and its paradigms is reassessed in her *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). However, the references I draw on here are still pertinent in the context of my analysis, particularly with reference to paradigmatic representations of the *Muslim female subject* as stereotype in both academic scholarship and cultural practices.

<sup>24</sup> Denise Riley, 'Am I That Name?' *Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990); Mohanty (1991); Lazreg (1988).

<sup>25</sup> Within my field of research these include: 'Muslim woman' in Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards A Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); 'Muslim Woman' in Zayzafoon (2005); 'the "Eastern" Woman' in Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2003); 'the veiled Muslim woman' in Faegheh Shirazi, *The Veil Unveiled: The Hijab in Modern Culture* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2001); 'the Muslim Woman' in Mohja Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman from Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin, TX: Texas University Press, 2002); 'Muslim Women' in Myra Macdonald, 'Muslim Women and the Veil: Problems of Image and Voice in Media Representations,' in *Feminist Media Studies*, Volume 6, Number 1 (March 2006), pp. 7–23.

<sup>26</sup> In as far as the category of 'woman' in Muslim societies is concerned, Deniz Kandiyoti argues that it 'must be grounded in a detailed examination of the political projects of contemporary states and of their historical transformations.' She continues, 'variations in the deployment of Islam in relation to different nationalisms, state ideologies and oppositional social movements are of central relevance to

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an understanding of the condition of women.' Deniz Kandiyoti, ed., *Women, Islam and the State* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), p. 2. See also Lazreg, who identifies paradigms which reify Algerian women and foreclose any understanding of them 'in their lived reality: as subjects in their own right.' Lazreg (1988), p. 94.

<sup>27</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove, 1965), pp. 58–9.

<sup>31</sup> Zayzafoon (2005), p. 81.

<sup>32</sup> Yeğenoğlu, (1998), p. 118.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Kaja Silverman asserts, 'Dress is one of the most important cultural implements for articulating and territorializing human corporeality,' in Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 118.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>37</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 118–9.

<sup>38</sup> El Guindi (1999), p. 5. It is important to emphasize that she also situates her study with reference to the 'material' and the 'religious.'

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>40</sup> *Satr* translates as 'to shield to guard, to cover, to protect, to veil' and *hijāb* as 'cover, wrap, curtain, veil, screen, partition.' El Guindi (1999), pp. 88, 157. See also Mernissi (1987), pp. 85–101.

<sup>41</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 113. The feminist theorists she identifies include Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, Rosi Braidotti and Vicki Kirby.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 114–5.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Butler (1997), p. 32.

<sup>47</sup> In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault argues that 'the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection ... the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body.' Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (Penguin, 1977), pp. 25–6.

<sup>48</sup> Butler (1997), p. 84.

<sup>49</sup> I am indebted throughout this study to Lois McNay for my use of the terms 'autonomy' and 'constraint.' McNay, 'Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler,' *Theory, Culture and Society*, Volume 16, Number 2 (1999), pp. 175–93; and McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> Butler, (1997), pp. 1–2.

<sup>51</sup> Lois McNay, (1999), p. 177. See also: James D. Faubion, ed., *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Volume 3*, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (London: Penguin, 2002), p. xx; Susan J. Hekman, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault* (Pennsylvania, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

<sup>52</sup> Butler (1997), p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 12–5.

<sup>54</sup> See McNay (1999), pp. 176–8 and p. 190, who herself cites Selya Benhabib, 'Subjectivity, Historiography and Politics,' and Nancy Fraser, 'False Antitheses' and 'Pragmatism, Feminism, and the Linguistic Turn,' in Selya Benhabib et al., eds, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (London: Routledge, 1995).



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<sup>55</sup> Rohi Baalbaki, *Al-Mawrid: A Modern Arabic-English Dictionary* (Beirut: Dar El-Ilm Lilmalayin, 1992), p. 97.

<sup>56</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 200.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 145. It is here important to note that the Derridean supplement has been employed in this field of research by Yeğenoğlu (1998) and Zayzafoon (2005), though not with specific reference to the *veil*. Rather, Yeğenoğlu situates the 'western woman as supplement' in the context of Orientalism (pp. 68–94), and Zayzafoon 'constructs the "Muslim woman"' with reference to Derrida's notion of 'excess' or supplementarity (p. 1).

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 103.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Judith Butler, 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism,"' in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds, *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3–21, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> Throughout the period of researching this thesis, major exhibitions engaging with the politics of identity and overcoming clichés concerning the region include: *Musulmanes Musulmans au Caire, à Téhéran, Istanbul, Paris, Dakar* (Le Parc de la Villette, Paris 2004); *DisORIENTATION: Contemporary Arab Artists from the Middle East* (House of World Cultures, Berlin 2003); *Far Near Distance: Contemporary Positions of Iranian Artists* (House of World Cultures, Berlin 2004); *Images of the Middle East* (Copenhagen, 2006); *Urban Islam* (Museum Der Kulturen, Basel 2006); *Arabise Me* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London 2006); *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking* (MOMA, New York, 2006); and the forthcoming *Islam 2007* (London).

<sup>62</sup> Lila Azam Zanganeh, ed., *My Sister Guard Your Veil; My Brother Guard Your Eyes: Uncensored Iranian Voices* (Boston, MA: Press, 2006), p. xvi.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. xiv.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>66</sup> Mohanty (1991), p. 73.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>70</sup> An exhibition entitled *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking* (MOMA, New York, 2006) proposed, as its organiser Fereshteh Daftari explains, 'to look at the work of a number of artists who come from the Islamic world but do not live there.' In her essay 'Islamic or Not' for the exhibition catalogue, Daftari explains that, 'To impose categories on artists who resist categorization, of course, is a contradiction in terms, and I do not intend *Without Boundary* to share in the homogenizing impulse that has become so widespread. To highlight the difficulty of making origin a defining factor in the consideration of art, then, the exhibition also includes two Western artists ... Although not influenced by artists from the Islamic world, these artists share interests, references and strategies with them.' Daftari avoids inscribing 'Islam' in the title of the exhibition yet includes the work of 'two Western artists' in an attempt to examine how far they relate to Islam; *Without Boundary* therefore inevitably makes the homogenization of Islam its point of reference and so contributes to the very discourses of categorization which it professes to resist. Fereshteh Daftari, 'Islamic or Not,' in *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking* (New York: MOMA, 2006), pp. 10–27, p. 10.

<sup>71</sup> I am here indebted in my terminology to Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis, MN : University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> For an instructive example of this, see Roland Kapferer's review of *Without Boundary* for *Frieze* magazine, particularly his assertion that, 'Although they do not seem aware of it, the three writers who have contributed essays [to the exhibition catalogue] – Fereshteh Daftari, Orhan Pamuk and Homi K. Bhabha – are all in one way or another complicit with new conceptions of corporate power issuing from the US and its global affiliates.' Roland Kapferer in *Frieze*, Issue 99, May 2006, p. 33.

<sup>73</sup> Tirdad Zolghadr, *Ethnic Marketing* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2006), p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 13.



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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> Mohanty (1991), p. 56, p. 73.

<sup>77</sup> El Guindi (1999), p. 10.

<sup>78</sup> Shirazi (2001), p. 6.

<sup>79</sup> Zanganeh (2006), p. xv.

<sup>80</sup> *Vogue Hommes International*, Fall/Winter 2003–4, pp. 178–179.

<sup>81</sup> Shirazi (2001), p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> El Guindi (1999), pp. xi–10.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>84</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 149, p. 152.

<sup>85</sup> Mohanty (1991), p. 55.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 365.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Vron Ware argues that the *veil* signifies a form of submission in essence, and engages with the difficulties this assumption poses to British feminists: 'the veil presents something of a problem, theoretically at least, since the act of covering the head suggests submission to men. It poses the question: to what extent should women support other women's right to practices and customs which appear to confirm their own subordination?' Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 251.

<sup>90</sup> In an interview, Butler opposes the assumption that the 'veiled body' constitutes an abject body when entering the public sphere. She argues, 'we as Westerners are misrecognizing a certain cultural artefact, a certain cultural and religious instrument that has been a traditional way for women to exert power.' Irene Costera Meijer and Baukje Prins, 'How Bodies Come to Matter: An Interview with Judith Butler,' in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Volume 23, Number 2 (1998), pp. 275–86, p. 282. In this context, Trinh T. Minh-ha similarly argues, 'If the act of unveiling has a liberating potential, so does the act of veiling. It all depends on the context in which such an act is carried out, or more precisely, on how and where women see dominance ... when women decide to lift the veil, one can say that they do so in defiance of their men's oppressive right to their bodies; but when they decide to keep or put back on the veil they once took off, they may do so to reappropriate their space or to claim a new difference, in defiance of genderless hegemonic standardization.' Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 151. The contention that *veiling* constitutes 'a phenomenon of upward social mobility' is underlined by Nadjé Al-Ali within the context of Egypt, as illustrated by: Leila Ahmed (1992); Sherifa Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992); Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Changes in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993); Arlene Elowe Macleod, *Accommodating Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling, and Change in Cairo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Azza Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt* (London: Macmillan, 1998); Fadwa El Guindi, 'Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement,' in *Social Problems*, Volume 28, Number 4 (1981), pp. 465–85. See Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 25.

<sup>91</sup> El Guindi (1999), p. xii.

<sup>92</sup> Mohanty (1991), p. 53.

<sup>93</sup> Nadjé Al-Ali, review of El Guindi (1999) in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Volume 6, Number 3 (September 2000), pp. 543–4, p. 544.

<sup>94</sup> For articles and papers from symposia worthy of note on the European debate on the *veil*, see Rada Ivekovic, 'The Veil in France: Secularism, Nation, Women,' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 March 2004, pp. 1117–9; Diana R. Blank, 'A Veil of Controversy: The Construction of a "Tchador Affair" in the French Press,' in *Interventions*, Volume 1, Number 4 (1999), pp. 536–54; Adrien Katherine Wing and Monica Night Smith, 'Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil?: Muslim Women,

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France, and the Headscarf Ban,' in *University of California Davis, Law Review* (2006), pp. 743–85; unpublished papers from the 8<sup>th</sup> EASA Conference (Vienna, 2004), 'Muslim Cultural Politics in Europe and the Middle East: Continuities and Disjunctures': Heiko Henkel, 'Conflicting Loyalties? Reflections on the Place of Islam in Contemporary Germany'; Chia Longman, 'Over our Heads? Muslim Women as Symbols and Agents in the Headscarf Debate in Flanders, Belgium'; Ruba Salih, 'Muslims and Europe: Navigating Across Secular and Religious Fields.' For a discussion of the *veil* in North America, see Homa Hoodfar, 'The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women,' in Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, eds, *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Sajida Sultana Alvi, Homa Hoodfar, and Sheila McDonough, eds, *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2003).

<sup>95</sup> I am indebted in my employment of the term 'semiotic mutability of the *veil*' to Zayzafoon (2005), p. 83.

<sup>96</sup> Judith Butler, 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism,"' in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds, *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3-21, p.8.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Butler (1990), p. 2.

<sup>100</sup> Butler (1997), pp. 31–2.



## 1 'Every Face Tells a Story': (Post)Colonial Cinematic Narratives and the Question of Female Agency<sup>1</sup>

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In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon introduces the *veil* as metonym; his essay 'Algeria Unveiled' begins, 'dress ... constitutes the most distinctive form of a society's uniqueness ... the most immediately perceptible.'<sup>2</sup> In Algeria, the *veil* 'appears with such constancy that it generally suffices to characterize Arab society,' and for the 'foreigner' it 'demarcates both Algerian society and its feminine component.'<sup>3</sup> He continues, 'It is by their apparel that types of society first become known, whether through written accounts and photographic records or motion pictures.'<sup>4</sup> In his opening lines, therefore, Fanon locates the *haïk* as the dominant feature in the articulation of the feminine constituent of the colonial landscape of Algeria. His rendition of the *haïk* as metonym is extended with reference to the photographic apparatus whereby dress is situated in direct relation to a *scopic* politics.<sup>5</sup> This perception is similarly manifested in the cinematic texts of Julien Duvivier's *Pépé Le Moko* (1937) and Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), in which *haïks* vividly distinguish the colonial landscape of the *mise-en-scène*.<sup>6</sup>

Although these films emerge from starkly opposed cinematic traditions, namely the French colonial cinema of the 1930s and Third Cinema, or the cinema of decolonization, I do not mean to disregard their historical and political specificity through this alignment. Rather, the argument which follows presents a comparative analysis, where references to the *haïk* and the *Muslim female subject* are isolated so as then to examine the way in which these representations relate to both the narrative structure and *mise-en-scène* of each text and to each other. In this sense,



therefore, it is important to reiterate the point made in my introduction that my alignment of texts from varying political and regional contexts throughout this thesis is situated within a methodological framework which draws upon what Lowe, after Foucault, refers to as 'heterotopicality,' that is, 'the continual yet uneven overlappings, intersections and collusions of discursive articulations.'<sup>7</sup> Lowe eschews the binary antagonism of Europe and its colonized countries, and argues instead that the relationship between them ought to be understood in terms of intersecting 'interpellations and stratifications.'<sup>8</sup> Orientalism, she avers, 'reanimates some of the structuring themes,' and emphasizes 'these overlapping and multiple inscriptions as moments of particular vulnerability in dominant discursive formations.'<sup>9</sup> *Pépé Le Moko* was made six years after the Colonial Exhibition in 1931, at a time when colonialism was a dominant theme in the film production of France.<sup>10</sup> *The Battle of Algiers*, on the other hand, emerged from de-colonial political discourse, and was directly concerned with the transformation of hegemonic ideologies.<sup>11</sup> Whilst these texts are born out of differing political ideas and periods, it is the intersections of specific discursive articulations, namely representations of the *haïk* and the *Muslim female subject*, that are of primary concern to this analysis. Thus, although this case study relates directly to Lowe's discussion of the heterogeneity of Orientalism(s) within European discourses, I shall continue to draw upon her deliberation concerning the discursive intersections between the formulations of Orientalist paradigms, discussed in this chapter, and their later reanimation by non-European texts, some of which are considered in the chapters which follow. My aim is to identify these intersections and then to

determine the extent to which they represent sites within dominant discursive formations.

For the purposes of this and the following chapter, there is a further significant distinction that needs to be made with reference to cinematic genres. In Chapter Two I draw upon Jane Gaines' essay, 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story,' which engages with Classic Hollywood productions. Gaines discusses the relationship between costume and narrative, where clothes, as elements of screen discourse, complement and support aspects of the narrative.<sup>12</sup> Costume, she argues, is 'fitted to characters as a second skin, working in this capacity for the cause of narrative by relaying information to the viewer about a "person."' <sup>13</sup> Gaines' analysis of costume in Hollywood productions engages with the way in which screen designers solved narrative problems through the use of costume. She explains how one such, Edith Head, was often said to have produced 'storytelling wardrobes,' and demonstrated the way costume could 'tell the woman's story.'<sup>14</sup> Through an examination of key designers, Gaines shows that costume 'in classical realist cinema where every element in the mise-en-scene ... serves the higher purpose of the narrative,' was 'restricted in what it was allowed to "tell."' <sup>15</sup> Chapter Two refers to Gaines' argument to examine the relationship between the *veil* and cinematic narratives. My referencing of her essay within the context of (post)colonial cinematic narratives and Iranian cinema is not intended to privilege the cinematic productions of Hollywood's classical period, nor to discount the stylistic and narrative specificities of varying filmic traditions and productions. Rather, Gaines'

essay serves to shed light on the way in which the *veil* as dress can also be understood in relation to narrative and ‘the woman’s story.’

My aim in this chapter is to examine the relationship between female agency and dress in the cinematic texts of *Pépé Le Moko* and *The Battle of Algiers*. I pay particular attention to the *haïk* and assess how those who wear it are situated and represented differently within the narrative from those who do not. In *Pépé Le Moko* I identify an apparent distinction between female agency and dress that lies in direct relation to the opposition between native and non-native women. I argue that the native woman wearing the *haïk* (the *Muslim female subject*) is employed as an element of the *mise-en-scène* and a metonym for the Casbah to signify the local within the frame. Following this, I illustrate how the *Muslim female subject* is contrasted with the female protagonist (the non-native) who is distinguished within the narrative structure through dress.

In *The Battle of Algiers*, however, this relationship is more complex. In demonstrating how Pontecorvo’s referencing of the Algerian woman (the *Muslim female subject*) varies from that of Duvivier, primarily in the way in which she is rendered an active participant in guerrilla warfare, I analyse the implications of his representation of female agency through dress within this colonial field. As in Duvivier’s text the question of female agency is distinguished through the opposition of native and non-native, so in *The Battle of Algiers* I contend that a distinction between the Algerian women and agency continues through an opposition between those who wear the *haïk* and those who do not. In this case,



however, those who do are only endowed with an agency once they *unveil*. I here engage extensively with the paradigm of *unveiling* within the context of Orientalist discourse and include within my discussion the construction of the *Muslim female subject* as stereotype. I examine the way in which restorative projects such as *The Battle of Algiers*, which belongs to the cinema of decolonization, can nevertheless continue to uphold and sustain the hegemony of colonial power. Finally, in light of Gaines' argument I examine the relationship between the *veil* and cinematic narrative in order to assess how the *veil* "tells" the woman's story.'

This chapter engages with *veil* discourse within the (post)colonial field. I first demonstrate the way in which the *Muslim female subject* is centralized within the colonial narrative and rendered a target and site for intervention. The closing section of the chapter then outlines the discourse of the *veil* within the context of de-colonial nationalism, which posits *veiling* as a direct derivative of the colonial project. This chapter is concerned with the way the paradigm of *unveiling* is situated as a dominant mode of subject formation in Orientalist discourse relating to the *Muslim female subject*. It illustrates how the paradigm of *unveiling* posits the *Muslim female subject* upon an epistemological ground that enables European patriarchal subjectivity to articulate itself as sovereign. I extend this observation with reference to the way in which the *Muslim female subject* is repeatedly associated with a sense of interiority through the paradigm, and illustrate how she is simultaneously rendered a metaphor for the land/Orient/nation, an entity to be penetrated and conquered. In relation to my overarching argument, this chapter comprises a historical case study which engages with European cinematic texts and Western

canonical discourse on the *veil*, such as Fanon's 'Algeria Unveiled,' arguably the first Western text to engage extensively with the subject of the *veil*.<sup>16</sup> I here focus on the colonial narrative of the *veil*, rendering the paradigm of *unveiling* of foremost concern to this analysis.

**Exit Pursued by a *Haïk*:  
Referencing the *Muslim Female Subject* in Duvivier's *Pépé Le Moko***

In a scene at the beginning of *Pépé Le Moko* a group of police officers discuss the whereabouts of Pépé as the camera pans into a map of the Casbah (PM.1) (refer to Figure 2.1). The map fades into a sequence that begins with an aerial view of the Casbah (PM.2). This is followed by two travelling shots of narrow streets accompanied by a voiceover describing the 'dark and twisted alleys' that form a tangled labyrinth (PM.3-4). The next shot reveals a woman in the street who wears a *haïk* and walks towards the camera (PM.5), followed by a shot of a child playing in the streets, with an arch forming the backdrop within the frame (PM.6). This is followed by a shot of a woman's legs walking down a staircase, revealing her shoes and parts of her *haïk* as she moves towards the camera (PM.7). The sequence continues with a travelling shot, with men walking and a cat running as the camera moves within the frame (PM.8-9) and the voiceover describes the 'foul dens' and 'stinking doorways ... infested with rot and vermin.' The subsequent shot is of a group of men wearing traditional clothes sitting in a café (PM.10). The voiceover describes 'the silent streets with strange names' to a shot of an empty street (PM.11), before a series of place names are listed.





Figure 2.1: *Pépé Le Moko* (1937)



Figure 2.2: *Pépé Le Moko* (1937)

A new series of shots begins, introducing the inhabitants of the Casbah (refer to Figure 2.2). The voiceover explains that there are ‘forty thousand people of all races where there should be ten thousand’ to the image of people moving within the frame; the bottom part of a woman’s legs, shoes and parts of her *haïk* are a dominant



feature within the shot (PM.12). The voiceover then describes the natives as ‘mysterious relics of a barbarous past’ as two men enter the frame (PM.13). A classification of ‘groups’ is introduced as a series of shots revealing the inhabitants begins: the Kabyles (PM.14), the Chinese (PM.15), gypsies (PM.16), stateless Germans (PM.17), slaves (PM.18), Maltese (PM.19), blacks (PM.20), Sicilians and Spaniards (PM.21). A new series begins with the voiceover explaining that there are also women ‘of all shapes and races’ alongside a travelling shot of groups of women (PM.22) and a series of still shots describing them (refer to Figure 2.3): big (PM.23), fat (PM.24), small (PM.25), old (PM.26), and shapeless (PM.27). A final series closes the sequence with a travelling shot of houses and courtyards (PM.28) followed by rooftops (PM.29) and terraces (PM.30) and a continued shot of terraces, which the voiceover explains ‘are ruled by native women, although the European is tolerated’ (PM.31). Another travelling shot of a rooftop and a laundry-line follows (PM.32), as the camera pans into a landscape shot of the Casbah (PM.33) before fading into the map again (PM.34).



Figure 2.3: *Pépé Le Moko* (1937)



The sequence here described introduces the viewer to the Casbah both spatially and geographically. The references to the maps at the beginning and end of the sequence contribute to this purpose. The first refers only to the Casbah, alluding to it as an entity isolated and separate from the rest of Algeria (PM.1). At the close of this series, the second map contextualizes the Casbah geographically in relation to Algiers by panning out to reveal a wider view of the region (PM.33). The Casbah, we are told, is 'a jungle,' which the sequence exemplifies through references to a chaotic and diverse locale manifested through stylistic techniques of travelling shots and varying camera angles. The descriptions of the Casbah are split thematically and grouped according to landscape and location, groups of inhabitants, women and architecture. Interestingly, the way these references are described provide an insight into how the *Muslim female subject* is situated within both the structure of the sequence and the narrative of the film as a whole.

When we are first introduced to the 'groups' of the Casbah, for example, the first shot presents the 'natives.' The accompanying image is of two men entering the space within the frame (PM.13). The natives are suggested visually yet not referred to as Algerians but rather as being from a 'barbarous past.' This manner of introduction stands in contrast to the list of inhabitants that follows, for the Chinese, Maltese, Spaniards and so on appear visually alongside their ethnic, racial or social classification. Amidst this series, visual references are made within the frames that are dissociated from the group described. The first such occurs when the Chinese group is introduced: two Chinese men appear on the foreground of either side of the

frame, whilst the *Muslim female subject* is centred in the background of the shot (PM.15). A shot which presents the Germans contains a similar reference (PM.17). Another reference to the *Muslim female subject* is made where the contours of a *haïk* appear on the right-hand side of the frame, whilst a man in medium close-up is seen on the left (PM.18). The presence of the *Muslim female subject* alternates between the shots, thus forming a structural reference to the *haïk* within the first six shots of the series. The *Muslim female subject* also constitutes the 'native,' like the two men who enter the space within the frame in shot PM.13, yet unlike them she is not introduced by the voiceover. Visibly present within the frame but denied verbal explication, the *Muslim female subject* adopts a consistent presence within the *mise-en-scène*, functioning only in relation to the description of other groups. She is simultaneously present and absent and stands as an element of the cultural make-up of the Casbah, yet one deemed unworthy of specific acknowledgement.

References to the *haïk* appear three times before the series discussed. At the beginning of the expository series that reveals the groups that live in the Casbah, a shot reveals the movement of people with numerous references to the white *haïk*; a woman whose legs, shoes and parts of her *haïk* are framed moves towards the camera (PM.12). Two further references are made, a similar shot of a woman's legs moving towards the frame (PM.7) and a shot of the *Muslim female subject* centred within the frame, also walking towards the camera (PM.5). In the first two shots described here (PM.12, PM.7) only part of the *haïk* appears within the frame, functioning as a metonym for the native woman, also evident in shot PM.18. When she appears in shot PM.12, the voiceover states that 'there are forty thousand people



living in the Casbah.’ The metonymic reference to the *Muslim female subject* by white *haïks* moving within the frame signifies a collective as opposed to an individual. The reference to ‘forty thousand’ reinforces the notion that the *haïk* represents a mass which forms part of the scenery of the Casbah. Crucially, when the *Muslim female subject* appears centred within the frame (PM.5), rather than acknowledging her presence, the voiceover describes instead the geography of the Casbah; in this shot, she is literally part of the landscape, a passive and anonymous component of the *mise-en-scène*.

In the final series of the sequence the voiceover refers to ‘the native woman’ who ‘rules the terraces’ of the Casbah. The aural description, however, is not accompanied by a visual image within the frame, which shows terraces but no native woman. This differs from the shot discussed earlier that describes the native men, who though not distinguished specifically appear in conjunction with the voiceover (PM.13). Furthermore, when a subsequent series introduces the women of the Casbah, the voiceover explains that there are women of ‘all shapes and races’ and the shots reveal women who vary in age, size and race, but the *Muslim female subject* is not shown among them (PM.22-27). References to the *haïk* and the *Muslim female subject* within this expository sequence exemplify her role as an element of the landscape within the shots of the Casbah. The use of metonymy through framed fragments of the white *haïk* further highlight the way in which the *Muslim female subject* becomes associated with the backdrop. Her absence when references to either ‘woman’ or ‘native’ are made further confirms her denied place within the film’s opening sequence.



Similar examples where the *Muslim female subject* functions as a constituent of the backdrop of the frame are evident throughout *Pépé Le Moko* (refer to Figure 2.4). A particularly interesting one occurs in a sequence towards the end of the film that reveals Slimane spying on Gaby and P  p   after the latter’s attempt to escape the Casbah. This begins with P  p   leaving his house and looking towards the left-hand side of the frame. Gaby enters the shot from this direction, there is a moment of recognition and they move toward each other. Slimane enters the shot and looks ahead towards them as P  p   and Gaby walk together without noticing him. They enter a room (PM.35) and a woman wearing a *ha  k* appears within the frame as soon as they close the door behind them (PM.36). Slimane enters the frame as the woman exits (PM.37-8). There follows a travelling shot of P  p   and Gaby ascending a staircase (PM.39) and walking towards another room amidst a group of people that includes a woman talking to a man (PM.40).



Figure 2.4: *P  p   Le Moko* (1937)

In this sequence the *Muslim female subject* continues to be present within the backdrop of the frame. She is, however, referred to structurally in relation to the three characters here featured (refer to Figure 2.5). When P  p   leaves his house and



enters the space within the frame, two women wearing the *haïk* appear before him (PM.41). Whilst the *mise-en-scène* also includes other people, including the men who appear within the shot, the women in *haïks* are a highly conspicuous feature as they walk across the screen. Although they do not appear in every shot of this sequence and in some instances move randomly within the frame, their movements are often synchronised to those of the three main characters.

When Gaby enters the space within the frame, a woman wearing a *haïk* similarly appears behind her (PM.42). The shot reveals men sitting on the lower left-hand side of the screen; the *Muslim female subject* here shadows Gaby's entrance. Slimane's entrance is more complex as it consists of a travelling shot during which two women wearing the *haïk* appear moving out of the frame (PM.43) and, as the camera follows him, another two women in the *haïk* also exit the frame (PM.44). The scene ends with a shot where two women in *haïks* move towards the right-hand side of the frame as Slimane turns his back to the camera. Whilst in narrative terms the *Muslim female subject* here continues to serve merely as an aspect of the Casbah's scenery, the thrice repeated visual motif of a pair of women wearing the *haïk* walking towards the right-hand side of the screen is even more reductive through its lack of variety.





Figure 2.5: *Pépé Le Moko* (1937)

In *Pépé Le Moko*, Duvivier uses the *Muslim female subject* to signify the local within the *mise-en-scène*, employing her as an embodiment of the Casbah in a scene otherwise devoid of visual references to the geographic context. In PM.35-7, an empty arched stairway acquires a local reference through the appearance of the *Muslim female subject*, who emerges from behind a wall as soon as Gaby and Pépé leave the frame and exits as Slimane enters it. In thus occupying the frame between the entrance and exit of the principal characters, the *Muslim female subject* serves as a signifier of the local, locating the unmarked terrain as part of the Casbah while simultaneously reinforcing her presence as a crucial element of the *mise-en-scène*.

As Pépé and Gaby make their final exit from the sequence, the camera comes to a halt as a woman speaks to a man whilst he shaves his beard. The woman, who speaks in French, has her hair covered by a piece of cloth and does not wear the *haïk* (PM.40). Her gypsy-like costume is similar to that worn by some of the women introduced by the voiceover in the opening sequence of the film. Whether she is a gypsy like Inès is not indicated, but the fact that she is not a 'native' is established



on the basis that she is not wearing a *haïk*. In this shot the woman describes to the man Gaby's outrageous costume. She, like Inès, speaks and is thus further differentiated from the *Muslim female subject*, who remains silent within the sequence. In a scene in which two men are searching for a character named Pierrot, his girlfriend Aicha enters the shot through an archway. As she moves towards the men a woman in a *haïk* crosses the frame; Aicha then informs them that Pierrot is not there (PM.45). Her name, like Slimane's makes a direct semantic reference to the Arab and arguably the native in this context. Whilst Slimane plays a larger role in the film than Aicha, her representation is more complex in as far as she relates to the native women. If we are to assume Slimane is a native, though this is not confirmed by the narrative, he is thereby associated with the men who appear frequently in the background of the *mise-en-scène*. Aicha, on the other hand, is distinguished from the native women in that she does not wear a *haïk*. The relationship between the presumed native characters, Aicha and Slimane, and the natives themselves is rendered complex through the natives' speech: both native men and women speak, but the latter only do so if they are not wearing the *haïk*.

In her essay, Gaines refers to manuals for silent film screenwriters which stress the importance of studying character by observing accessories such as shoes, gloves and jewellery:

Clothes and mannerisms in these early manuals are not vehicles for conveying the sense of a 'real' person nor are they elements utilized in the craft of character construction, they are 'truths' told about persons. Character

writing here depends on an idea that real selves (rather than types) can be studied by reading appearance signs which are communicated in public.<sup>17</sup>

In *Pépé Le Moko*, the notion of 'real self' versus 'type' is best manifested in shot PM.42 where Gaby's entrance is synchronized with the movement of a woman wearing a *haïk* behind her. Gaby is central in the shot whilst the *Muslim female subject* remains in the backdrop; her centrality within the frame is compounded by the fact that her costume stands in contrast to all that is represented by the 'local,' that is to say, the Casbah and the *Muslim female subject*. This is particularly evident in her first appearance in the film as she walks the streets of the Casbah (PM.46) and in an outdoor shot when Slimane refers to her as 'the one with the diamonds.' (PM.47).

Gaby, we are told by the woman in shot PM.40, is 'not a woman' but 'a walking jeweller.' When she asks Slimane if P  p   has mentioned her after their first meeting, she adds, 'He liked my pearls,' to which Slimane answers, 'One can like women and admire pearls.' Gaby's costume, and particularly her jewellery, functions as a narrative agent for the manner in which it brings P  p   and her together (PM.48) (refer to Figure 2.6). The shot-reverse-shot that introduces their first encounter inscribes Gaby's jewellery in separate shots within the series, leading to repeated close-ups of the characters' eyes (PM.49-54). Gaby's jewellery 'speaks' in as far as it instigates this exchange of desirous glances. Her jewellery, magnified and framed, followed by P  p  's eyes framed in close-up, connect the shots that finally culminate in the sexual image of Gaby's isolated mouth (PM.55).





Figure 2.6: *Pépé Le Moko* (1937)

Gaines argues that,

Although all characters, regardless of gender, are conceived as ‘costumed’ in motion pictures, a woman’s dress and demeanor, much more than a man’s, indexes psychology; if costume represents interiority, it is she who is turned inside out on screen.<sup>18</sup>

Gaby’s interiority and her relationship with Pépé are suggested through references to her jewellery, as for example in the scene that reveals the characters’ first kiss. In a series of shot-reverse-shots Pépé tells Gaby that she is beautiful and reminds him of Paris: ‘You are all money, diamonds and silk and you make me think of the Metro ... of bags of chips and coffee on the café terrace.’ They exchange an intense gaze before Gaby explains how before this she longed for the jewellery and they kiss. Gaby’s line produces a narrative crescendo manifested in the protagonists’ first kiss, which is foretold in the previous sequence by the reference to Gaby’s isolated mouth.



Gaby and P  p  's attraction is manifested in her jewellery, which in turn communicates their desire. Her costume is a strong element of screen discourse within the colonial landscape of the Casbah, where dress 'tells' the story of seduction. Gaby is Paris in Algiers and, despite being diamonds and silk, reminds P  p   of the Metro; she is costumed extravagantly to oppose the local *mise-en-sc  ne*, unlike the *Muslim female subject* who stands as its very embodiment. Gaby stands in opposition to the local through references to her jewellery, which 'speak' and seduce P  p  ; through costuming she acts as a narrative agent, driving P  p   to his suicide at the end of the film. In *P  p   Le Moko* costuming plays a role in speech, where the *Muslim female subject*, a metonym for the local, remains silent throughout the narrative.

### **The Paradigm of *Unveiling* and the Reinvention of Subjectivity in Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers***

Unlike in *P  p   Le Moko*, in Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* the *Muslim female subject* does not feature solely as a passive entity. Whilst she continues to form part of the landscape of the Casbah, Pontecorvo nonetheless portrays the Algerian woman as an active participant in revolutionary warfare, a point underscored early in the film when the protagonist, Ali la Pointe, attempts to shoot a policeman (refer to Figure 2.7). The voiceover of a young boy reading instructions to Ali first references the *Muslim female subject* within the frame when he states, 'Right next to the caf   you'll see a girl with a basket.' The shot reveals a woman in a *haik* leaning against the wall as Ali looks at her and walks towards the camera (BA.1). There follows a close-up of Ali's face before he turns and looks at the woman, who remains in the



backdrop (BA.2). At this point the voiceover explains, ‘At the right moment she’ll give you a gun and you’ll shoot him.’ A shot depicts the woman’s basket from which she reveals a gun that she hands to Ali (BA.3). The attempted shooting takes place and the woman picks up the gun from the floor and runs away (BA.4). Ali runs after her and they take cover in a house together. The scene ends with the woman taking the gun from the basket and hiding it underneath her clothes, then further *veiling* herself before they both leave the house and walk down the street (BA.5-7).



Figure 2.7: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

The scene here described centralizes the Algerian woman amidst the action, primarily in the way she is responsible for the weapon. It exemplifies Ranjana Khanna’s contention in ‘*The Battle of Algiers and The Nouba of the Women of Mont Chenoua: From Third to Fourth Cinema*,’ where she highlights the influence of Fanon’s ‘Algeria Unveiled’ upon *The Battle of Algiers*, explaining that Pontecorvo embraces the essay’s potential for filmic dramatisation.<sup>19</sup> ‘Algeria Unveiled’ is Fanon’s most comprehensive engagement with the role of women in the struggle for national independence in Algeria. Its significance is further marked by his



considerable engagement with the question of the *veil* and the way in which it became, as he asserts, 'the bone of contention in a grandiose battle.'<sup>20</sup> Fanon's testament to the women of Algeria and their place in the resistance to French colonialism is summed up when he writes that, 'revolutionary war is not a war of men ... The Algerian woman is at the heart of the combat.'<sup>21</sup> Pontecorvo's visual translation of this assertion is first witnessed in the scene described above, which comprises the first reference to the *Muslim female subject* in *The Battle of Algiers*. The director's emphasis on the role of women in the colonial contest is evinced not only by his making a woman the initial carrier of arms, but also in the way the *Muslim female subject* is represented throughout this scene. In the first shot, for example, Ali walks past her as the voiceover reads the instructions of the plot, at which point he turns to look at her before walking towards the camera (BA.1). The second shot illustrates Ali in close-up as he turns around to look at the woman who remains in the backdrop (BA.2). In these shots, whilst the *Muslim female subject* is positioned in the backdrop of the frame, she is nonetheless centralized by the way in which she is continuously acknowledged by the protagonist, who turns around to look at her. In the concluding shot of this scene, two women wearing the *haïk* walk towards the camera as Ali and the woman make their way in the opposite direction (BA.7). This, alongside the way in which the voiceover positions woman as the primary point of reference in the plot against the policemen, serves to introduce the centrality of the Algerian woman in the conflict. Her rendition as an active agent in revolutionary warfare is firmly established by the exposition and conclusion of this sequence at the start of Pontecorvo's narrative.



This descriptive account demonstrates how Pontecorvo's representation of the *Muslim female subject* varies extensively from the way she is portrayed in *Pépé Le Moko*, where she is referenced merely as a feature of the *mise-en-scène*, a metonym for the Casbah. This stems mainly from the fact that *The Battle of Algiers* belongs to a very different cinematic genre, one that was born out of a movement predicated on the desire radically to challenge hegemonic ideologies.<sup>22</sup> In addition to this context, Khanna asserts that Pontecorvo firmly supported Algerian independence and wanted to produce a film that would demonstrate his sympathy for the Algerian people.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, prior to Khanna's work, this view was propounded by Robert Stam and Louise Spence in their influential essay 'Colonialism, Racism and Representation,' which explains how the film inverts the idea of suturing the spectator into the colonialist's perspective.<sup>24</sup> *The Battle of Algiers*, they argue, exploits the 'identificatory mechanisms' of cinema on behalf of the colonized as opposed to the colonizer since 'the film exposes the oppressive logic of colonialism and consistently fosters our complicity with the Algerians.'<sup>25</sup> My argument shall proceed to examine the relationship between the *Muslim female subject* and the question of female agency in light of these observations.





Figure 2.8: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

Halfway through *The Battle of Algiers* three women disguise themselves as French women to plant bombs targeting the colonizers (refer to Figure 2.8). The sequence begins to the sound of percussions with a woman, Hassiba, *unveiling* to the camera as though before a mirror (BA.8.1-3). The camera then zooms out to reveal three women looking into the mirror, two without the *haïk* and the third in the process of *unveiling* (BA.9.1-3). The reflection of the first woman is shown again in medium close-up as she unpins her hair (BA.10). This is followed by a series of shots that present the women in reflection, each in turn preparing her disguise: they brush and arrange their hair, apply lipstick, and the first woman appears in close-up with a pair of scissors pressed against her hair before cutting it (BA.11-13). All three women are then shown within the frame changing their clothes, donning and fastening skirts



into which they tuck their shirts (BA.14). The first woman sits down to dye her hair, looking into the camera as though into the mirror before beginning the process (BA.15). The camera zooms into her face before a freeze frame and the percussion sounds end (BA.16).

Pontecorvo's visual dramatization of 'Algeria Unveiled' is fully apparent in the two scenes described above, and especially in the politicization of the *veil* in the Algerian colonial contest. Fanon explains how the revolutionary tactics women adopted with reference to the *veil* were adopted in varying stages. Initially it was discarded so women could enter the European city 'exposed.'<sup>26</sup> Through this revolutionary tactic, he explains, Algerian women disguised themselves to circumvent military checkpoints and soldiers since they now travelled unnoticed: 'The unveiled Algerian woman,' he writes, 'moves like a fish in the Western waters.'<sup>27</sup> During the second phase, however, the *veil* re-emerged, a fact visually manifested by Pontecorvo towards the end of the first scene described above in which the woman hides the gun 'with the protective *haïk*' before further *veiling* herself.<sup>28</sup> This final gesture directly illustrates Fanon's observation that women's bodies became shapeless during this phase as a result of their hiding guns and grenades within the folds of their *haïks*. In this shot, Pontecorvo posits the *veil* as the central connection between woman and revolutionary warfare, a connection which is reinforced by the act of re-*veiling*, which draws the viewer's attention back to the *veil*. Fanon explains, however, that during this phase the *veil* did not suffice and that other techniques were adopted to transport heavy objects whilst simultaneously giving the impression that the women had their hands free.<sup>29</sup> This is forcefully illustrated when the Algerian woman is first

introduced in *The Battle of Algiers*. Here Pontecorvo places significant emphasis upon the basket, first in its alignment with woman by the voiceover – ‘you’ll see a girl with a basket’ – and then through its re-appearance in close-up when the woman reveals the gun. (BA.3).

Fanon’s treatment of the *veil* is most notable for the way it both establishes and employs the *unveiling* paradigm with reference to the French colonial occupation of Algeria. During the initial stages of the occupation, Fanon explains that victory over the native women was deemed essential in order for the colonial administration to pursue its intervention.<sup>30</sup> This deliberation, he writes, culminated in a precise political doctrine:

If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight.<sup>31</sup>

‘Converting’ the Algerian woman, or rather salvaging her from her present status, was posited as a ‘means of deconstructing Algerian culture,’ a colonial strategy facilitated by rendering Islam a site of barbarity and backwardness.<sup>32</sup> The *veil* emerged as a primary target of this strategy, largely through its connection with Islam and the subjugation of women within Islamic patriarchy. Writing within the context of British colonial Egypt, Leila Ahmed proffers a similar argument on the discourse of the *veil* when she claims that the treatment of women within Islamic societies constitutes an integral element of ‘the Western narrative of the



quintessential otherness and inferiority of Islam.’<sup>33</sup> She explains that the issue of women only took on central importance within this narrative in the nineteenth century when European colonial power was established in the region.<sup>34</sup> The new centrality of the position of women led to the development of the language of feminism during this period, which gained such currency in colonial discourse that, ‘Even as the Victorian male establishment devised theories to contest the claims of feminism ... it captured the language of feminism and redirected it, in the service of colonialism, toward Other men and the cultures of Other men.’<sup>35</sup> Ahmed explains that colonialism appropriated the language of feminism, adapting its discourse to the cultures that were subject to colonial rule.<sup>36</sup> The main objection to Islam was the question of the status of women, with the *veil* and gender segregation standing as symbols of the inherent oppressiveness of Islam:

Veiling – to *Western eyes*, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies – became the symbol now of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam’s degradation of women) and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of assault on Muslim societies.<sup>37</sup>

Written in 1959, ‘Algeria Unveiled’ centres on the Algerian War of Independence, initiated in 1954 by the National Liberation Front (FLN) and which continued after Fanon’s *A Dying Colonialism* was published, until the defeat of French colonial rule in 1962. Thus, whilst Fanon’s narrative belongs to a different period to that outlined by Ahmed, his thesis in ‘Algeria Unveiled’ is nonetheless analogous to hers, especially in its exposure of the way that the *veil* became centralized as a product of

Islamic barbarity and thus rendered a discursive site for colonial intervention. Fanon's deliberation of this political doctrine, however, is itself engendered through an alignment between the Algerian woman and Algeria itself, where the paradigm of *unveiling* is employed metaphorically to encapsulate this intervention. As he writes, 'the occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria':<sup>38</sup>

Every rejected veil disclosed to the eyes of the colonialists horizons until then forbidden, and revealed to them, piece by piece, the flesh of Algeria laid bare. The occupier's aggressiveness, and hence his hopes, multiplied ten-fold each time a new face was uncovered ... Every veil that fell, every body that became liberated from the traditional embrace of the *haik*, every face that offered itself to the bold and impatient glance of the occupier, was a negative expression of the fact that Algeria was beginning to deny herself and was accepting the rape of the colonizer.<sup>39</sup>

The alignment of the *unveiling* of Algerian women with the rape of the nation is evinced persistently throughout 'Algeria Unveiled,' where Fanon employs the metaphor of penetration to refer to the ideological and military interventions in Algeria. Whilst his thesis extends the colonial narrative to which Ahmed draws our attention, his rhetoric is also rooted in a method of representation concerned with the gendering of territorial lands intended for conquest. Indeed, it falls within what in *Imperial Leather* McClintock terms 'porno-tropics,' that is, the long tradition of rendering other continents as sites into which forbidden sexual fears and desires were projected by the European imagination.<sup>40</sup> Alongside this ran a consistent metaphysical conception in Enlightenment thought of knowledge as a power dynamic between gendered spaces: 'the male penetration and exposure of a veiled,



female interior; and the aggressive conversion of its “secrets” into a visible, male science of the surface.’<sup>41</sup>

The pornographic comic *Orient Sexpress* offers a crude rendition of the porno-tropic tradition identified by McClintock in which ‘the world is feminized and spatially spread for male exploration (Figure 2.9).’<sup>42</sup> From its first frame it depicts entrance into the forbidden space in explicit sexual terms, opening with the penetrative metaphor of an aeroplane crossing into clouds. The phallic reference is reinforced in the ensuing image by a minaret standing between two domes. The setting is the city of Istanbul, which the caption describes as ‘a bridge between Europe and Asia,’ followed by reference to female subjugation, where the *veil* and polygamy are rendered sites of Islamic barbarity, a theme extended throughout the narrative of the comic; the first caption explains that, ‘one is allowed to have four women at once,’ as four women walk behind a man. A caption then describes, ‘Four “covered” females ... but not entirely,’ as a woman’s face is shown in close-up, *veiled* with the adding that whilst ‘It used to be Christian, now it is Muslim.’<sup>43</sup> This is immediately lower part of her face revealed, as the next image pans out to show that her breasts are also exposed.<sup>44</sup> The final illustration plays on the relationship between *veiling* and revealing central to representations of the *Muslim female subject* within this tradition by inverting the function of the *burqu*’ to show the mouth rather than the eyes. This image, also the front cover of the comic, and the ensuing one of the exposed breasts, enact McClintock’s contention concerning the way women featured in this tradition ‘as the epitome of sexual aberration and excess ... given to a lascivious venery so promiscuous as to border on the bestial.’<sup>45</sup>



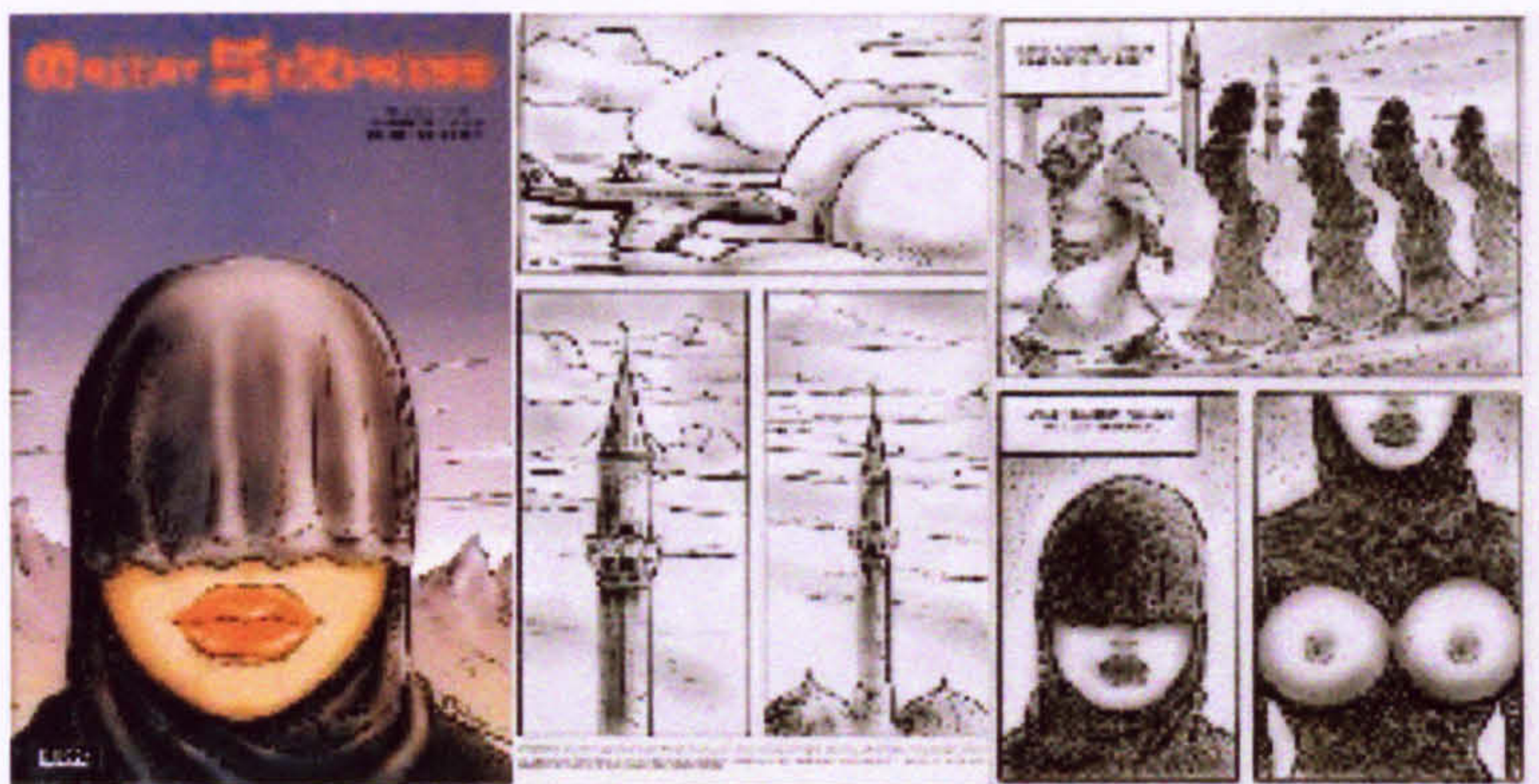


Figure 2.9: *Orient Sexpress* (2002)

Pontecorvo's aesthetic discourse falls likewise into this tradition, further validating the argument that *The Battle of Algiers* is heavily influenced by Fanon's essay (refer to Figure 2.10). Indeed, Joan Mellen, the first commentator on *The Battle of Algiers*, asserts that 'the close-up of the smiling eyes of an Algerian woman expresses the spirit of solidarity among her people,' where such images underlie Pontecorvo's portrayal of 'woman as a symbol of Algeria and of the national spirit' (BA.17).<sup>46</sup> Whilst Fanon's rhetoric genders violence through the metaphoric *unveiling* of Algeria, Pontecorvo, on the other hand, deploys this tradition through gendering violence in the *mise-en-scène*. One scene, for example, begins with French police patrolling an area of the Casbah contained by barbed wires and fences (BA.18). This landscape continues throughout the series, where the final shots reveal women and children in an enclosure with barbed wire surrounding the space before the screen, as a French soldier seals it off with a hammer (BA.19). Pontecorvo here employs an aesthetic of binary opposites, situating the male/colonizer in the exterior and the female/colonized in the interior. References to barbed wire reinforce the aesthetics of gendered space, culminating in the final shot, which reveals a feminized interior (BA.20). Moreover, the alignment of the colonized with interiority and the colonizer



with exteriority is heightened by the fact that this scene is located within the quarters of the Casbah, an interior space designated to the natives of Algeria, and enclosed by the exterior of the 'European city.' The narrative opens with a sequence of shots, repeated towards the end of the film, depicting the colonized masculine exterior, embodied in the French soldiers violently encroaching upon the feminine colonized interior space of the Casbah (BA.21-4). Indeed, Pontecorvo's rendition of gendered violence alongside an aesthetics which situates the colonized within an interior space is repeated throughout *The Battle of Algiers* (BA.25-7).



Figure 2.10: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

In the first scene described above in which the women are enclosed by barbed wire, interiority is literally feminized through references to the *Muslim female subject*. Pontecorvo continues, however, to feminize the colonized subject, regardless of gender, by demarcating them with interiority. This is evinced in a scene in which French soldiers arrest an innocent man they believe responsible for an attack, where the stylistic techniques engender an equation of the Algerian with the interior. This



is first manifest through a contrast in spatial dimensions within the frame, as French inhabitants look down from their balconies into a space where an Algerian man sits on the ground (BA.28 -29). In these shots, the Algerian embodies interior space within the frame in the way in which he becomes increasingly enclosed by his surroundings, where the buildings create a border which surrounds him (BA.30). This effect is compounded when the man attempts to escape and French soldiers drive towards him (BA.31). Policemen appear from the right-hand side of the frame whilst soldiers appear from the left, confining him in a diminishing interior space (BA.32).

Another sequence which similarly situates the colonized is the hunt for Ali La Pointe and his colleagues (refer to Figure 2.11). This follows the action described previously of the soldiers infiltrating the Casbah. Pontecorvo's aesthetic of gendering the *mise-en-scène* is extended as soldiers brandishing their guns penetrate the house, which itself embodies an interior/exterior structure (BA.33). An establishing aerial shot reveals the colonized are positioned within the interior courtyard space, framed by the balcony above and the soldiers who surround them (BA.34). This dynamic of interior/exterior-colonized/colonizer is emphasized throughout the scene, which ends with the soldiers investigating the whereabouts of suspects hiding in the house. The sequence that begins with the penetration of the Casbah thus presents the colonized in an increasingly diminishing interior space, culminating in a shot of Ali La Pointe and his colleagues huddling in a small, dark cavity concealed behind a wall (BA.35-6). Pontecorvo's gendering of the *mise-en-scène* is manifest through a violent encroachment into enclosed space and the



depiction of interiority, also present in the use of props, such as the gun and the basket described in the first scene of this analysis. Such penetrative metaphors serve not only to foreground Pontecorvo's aesthetic discourse in terms of gendering the revolution, but also underscore the place of *the Muslim female subject* in relation to revolutionary warfare.

In another scene in the film in which barbed wire dominates the frame, French soldiers search Algerians at a checkpoint. A travelling shot depicts a soldier interrogating a man as a woman in a *haïk* walks towards the right-hand side of the frame (BA.37) (refer to Figure 2.11). The woman appears behind fences of barbed wire and walks past a French soldier before being stopped by another soldier, who attempts to search her. She reacts violently, asking them not to touch her (BA.38). As she walks away, un-searched, the second soldier says to the first, 'Never touch their women.' Here, Pontecorvo aligns the *Muslim female subject* with the barbed wire through the way in which they both foreground the issue of boundaries and space. This alignment is manifest in the travelling shot which reveals the frame obscured with barbed wire as the Algerian woman in a *haïk* walks along. Whilst this situates the colonized within an interior space, the final shot of the sequence serves to conflate the *Muslim female subject* and the barbed wire in so far as they both represent a boundary that should not be touched.



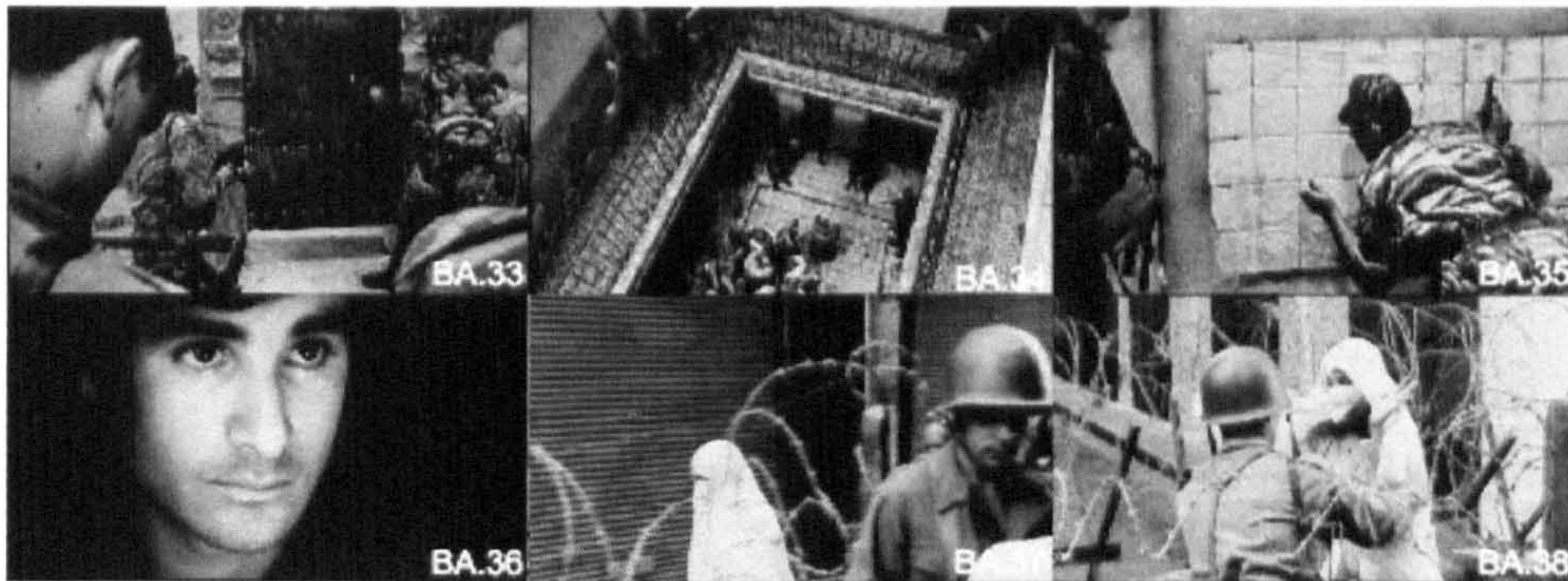


Figure 2.11: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

Fanon writes that the *veil* ‘covers the body and disciplines it, tempers it’; he adds, it ‘protects, reassures, isolates.’<sup>47</sup> Similarly, the presentation of the *Muslim female subject* in *The Battle of Algiers* as an entity isolated and protected by the *veil* is forcefully illustrated in the scene described above, which endows the woman with an autonomy that allows her to cross the check-point unmolested by the soldiers. In another scene, a woman in a *haïk* walks towards a native man and leans to kiss him. The following shot reveals her kissing him in close-up as she covertly hands him a gun from beneath her *haïk*. The man takes the gun as the camera pans out to reveal him firing it at a seated French policeman as the woman continues to stand in front of him. Whilst in the first scene described, Pontecorvo attributes protection and isolation to the *Muslim female subject* herself, in the following scene it is the space that surrounds the *Muslim female subject* which is here endowed with these qualities, thus allowing the man to shoot before her.

In ‘The Berber House,’ Pierre Bourdieu presents the social construction of domestic space in terms of a gendered opposition, where female space is described as ‘the place *par excellence* of the *haram* [*sic*], i.e. of all which is sacred and forbidden, and



a closed and secret space, well-protected and sheltered from intrusions and the gaze of others.’<sup>48</sup> Within the home, he argues, ‘the universe of women and the world of intimacy and privacy, is *haram* [sic], that is to say, at once sacred and illicit for every man who does not form part of it.’<sup>49</sup> In *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860-1950*, Sarah Graham-Brown offers a similar definition, explaining that in Arabic *harīm* or ‘*harem*’ [sic] denotes a sacred place, and refers to the female members of the family, and that the division of domestic space went alongside the seclusion of women from the sight of men other than their relatives.<sup>50</sup> She observes that the Orientalist imagination was captivated by fantasies of the *harīm*, which obscured much of the reality of women’s lives in the region and gave rise to the proliferation of art and literature which presented ‘a forbidden world of women, of sexuality caged and inaccessible.’<sup>51</sup> Photography in particular compounded this mythology, purporting to expose the ‘real’ lives of women by representing the private spaces screened from visibility, often through studio reconstructions. The walls of the *harīm* thus ‘appeared as the definitive boundary between the public and the private spheres, and reinforced the notion that this boundary marked off, in an absolute way, the domain of women.’<sup>52</sup> Arguing that female seclusion offered a challenge to the Western male traveller, Graham-Brown asserts that the photographer here adopted ‘the privileged position of the voyeur entering this closed and private space, and allowing the viewer to do likewise.’<sup>53</sup>

El Guindi draws on Ahmed to identify the way in which *veiling* in the Middle East forms part of ‘a material/ideological set of presumably connected practices and institutions,’ which comprise ‘the complex *veil-harem-eunuchs-seclusion-polygamy*,

[sic]' proposing that such an alignment forecloses cultural specificity.<sup>54</sup> Regardless of this, however, the *veil/harīm* conjunction is continually deployed in representation, albeit with varying emphases on their shared attributes. Graham-Brown elaborates on Fatima Mernissi's thesis that all sexual institutions, such as polygamy, repudiation and sexual segregation, are strategies for containing power, where segregation and containing the visibility of women constitute the operations of patriarchal dominion over female sexuality.<sup>55</sup> Malek Alloula in *The Colonial Harem*, on the other hand, proffers an interesting case in terms of a *scopic* politics, namely in the way that he situates this construction as defined to the viewer by 'the initial frustration' of visibility.<sup>56</sup> He equates the *veil* and the *harīm* through presenting the manner in which they obscure visibility in terms of women's imprisonment.<sup>57</sup>

In *The Colonial Harem*, a postcard reveals a photograph of a woman with a nude torso leaning against a barred window. A man on the other side of the window holds on to the bars and fixes her with his gaze. The notion of gendered space in relation to an opposition of interior and exterior identified by Graham-Brown is here maintained, with the photographer assuming the privileged position of the interior occupied by the woman. Alloula here states that the postcard provides 'dramatic illustration of the sexual connotation of confinement that is overdetermined by the phantasm of the harem [sic].'<sup>58</sup> 'In it,' he surmises, 'the imprisonment of women becomes the *equivalent of sexual frustration*.'<sup>59</sup> Significantly, the notion of the frustrated viewer is central to the perception of the *Muslim female subject* in 'Algeria Unveiled,' where Fanon writes that the 'Algerian woman, in the eyes of the



observer, is unmistakably “she who hides behind a veil.”<sup>60</sup> The Algerian woman, he continues, ‘frustrates the colonizer’ since ‘She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself.’<sup>61</sup> He writes, ‘Unveiling this woman is ... breaking her resistance ... There is in it the will to bring this woman within his reach, to make her a possible object of possession.’<sup>62</sup> Thus, whilst Alloula situates triumph over the obstacle of visual control through a metaphor of penetration – ‘he must penetrate the harem’ [*sic*]- in ‘Algeria Unveiled,’ however, accomplishment is engendered through the paradigm of *unveiling*.

*Veils*, a graphic novel written by Pat McGreal, presents a paradigmatic representation of the *unveiling* of the *Muslim female subject* in its opening pages (Figure 2.12). The narrative comprises the protagonist Vivian’s private journal, beginning with her recounting her journey with her newly wed husband Harry ‘across the Continent ... to a strange and ancient city.’<sup>63</sup> One illustration reveals a slave market, where a woman donning the face and body *veil* is centralized as a spectacle on stage. The subsequent frame shows the woman isolated on stage, with Vivian’s description: ‘We saw there a woman for sale ... not much younger than myself.’<sup>64</sup> The woman then appears in close-up as the illustration represents the process of *unveiling*, encapsulated in the caption: ‘With considerable ostentation, the slave dealer teasingly removed the veil that concealed her face.’<sup>65</sup> The scene continues to show the woman *unveiled* within the frame and exposed to the audience; the viewer is here situated at the rear of the stage and able to witness the back of the *unveiled* body and the audience’s reception of this spectacle.



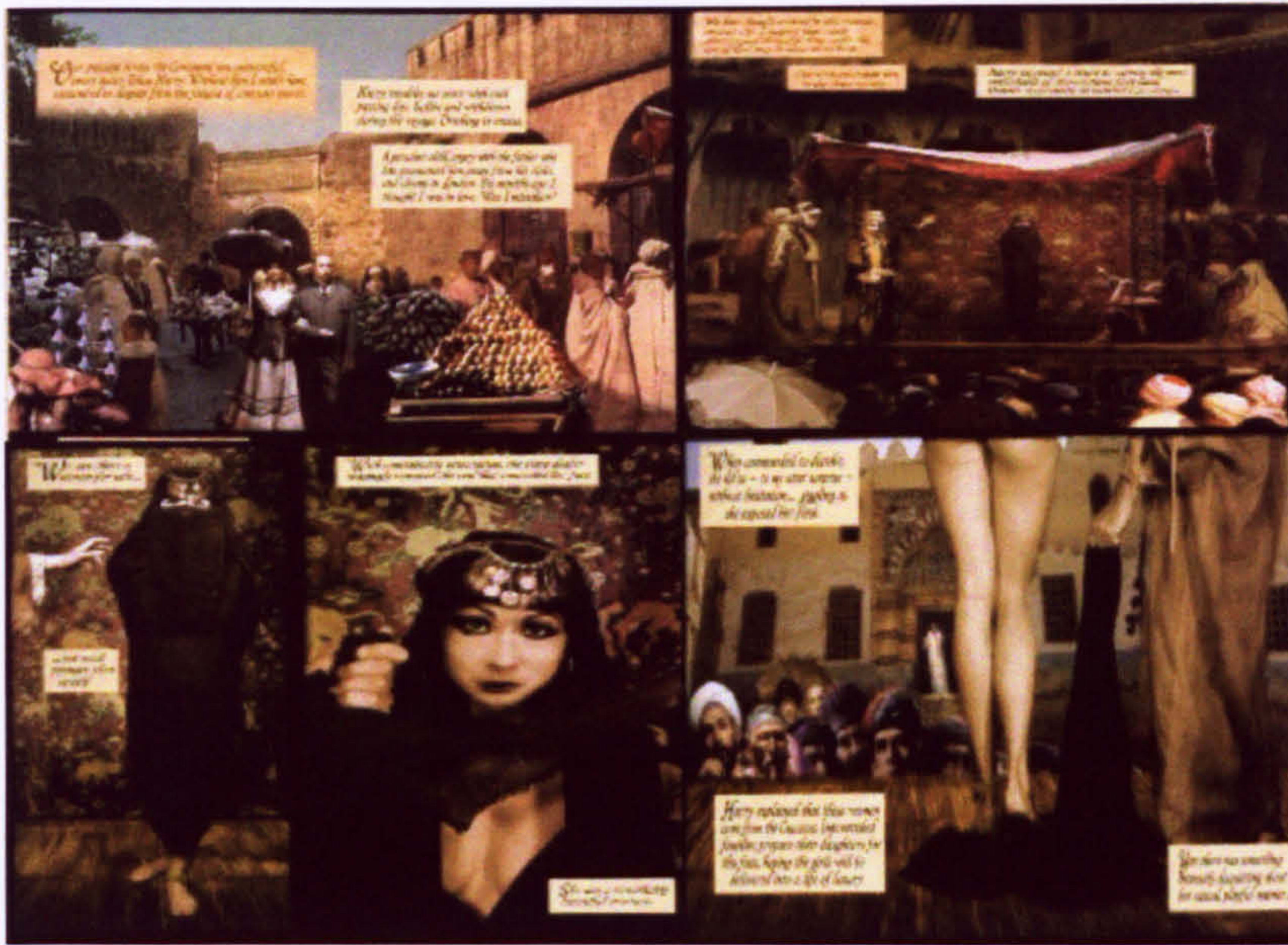


Figure 2.12: *Veils* (1999)

This sequence delivers an archetypal representation of the process of *unveiling*, namely in its centralization of the dialectical relationship between *veiling* and revealing. The woman, who appears entirely covered, is later shown partially *veiled*, before her complete exposure. The *veiling*/revealing dialectic is strongly reinforced in the mediatory stage of this process, where the woman's face and cleavage are prominently revealed whilst the *veil* continues to be referenced alongside her exposed flesh. Furthermore, the act of *unveiling* itself in the second and third frames is foregrounded by the fact that a man's hand is continually referenced as he carries out the process. The anticipated *unveiling* scenario, first introduced in the second frame as the male hand reaches towards the woman, is executed, culminating in the observation that, 'She was a remarkably beautiful creature.'<sup>66</sup> Whilst this denouement seemingly completes the first process of *unveiling* within this scene, the process is in fact only accomplished in the subsequent frame in which the woman appears entirely exposed to the audience. Significantly, the *unveiling* process here



manifestly draws on established references which have informed the tradition and context of this paradigm in representation, and which are outlined in the discussion above.

The final frame of this sequence makes reference to oppositions of gendered space where it presents a man in the background facing the stage, caged and clutching the bars of a window (Figure 2.13). The contrast between inside and outside is in this instance reversed, as the woman stands before him adopting the exterior open space, whilst his incarceration alludes to the *harīm*. Thus, Alloula's contention that the imprisonment of women embodies 'the *equivalent of sexual frustration*' continues to inform the scene, though is here inverted as the man is caged and the woman who stands before him rendered visible. The reader is once again situated in the privileged position of the voyeur, which, whilst no longer the interior, is nonetheless the space occupied by the woman, witnessing the audience's reaction to her *unveiling*. Moreover, the man's confinement underscores the notion of barriers and interiority awaiting penetration, which constitute the grammar which informs the paradigm of *unveiling*; the opening lines of the scene further highlight this in Vivian's suspicion that, 'every glorious and shameful thing under the eye of God may be discovered here.'<sup>67</sup> Following this, therefore, the sense of discovery here posits the *veil*, as Yeğenoğlu writes, 'as the resisting data or tropology of this modern power whose program aims to construct the world in terms of a transparency provided by knowledge as power.'<sup>68</sup> In this context, the alignment of *unveiling* with discovery situates the paradigm of *unveiling* within a tradition rooted, as she further



asserts, in ‘a problematic of power which establishes conquest in terms of an epistemologic superiority.’<sup>69</sup>



Figure 2.13: *Veils* (1999)

Elsewhere in her study, Yeğenoğlu asserts that the ‘veil and the reality that is presumed to be hidden by it serves the subject’s need for an imaginary component, the Lacanian *object [sic] petit a*, in the act of constituting himself.’<sup>70</sup> In other words, the *veil* as difference acts as the means through which the traveller or colonizer defines the sense of his superior subjectivity. She further argues that in rendering the imagined essence behind the *veil* ‘the repository of truth,’ the subject here ‘turns his need to represent himself to himself as a subject of knowledge and reason.’<sup>71</sup> Yeğenoğlu thus contends that through this method of constitution, that is, the Orientalist’s production of identity through difference, the *Muslim female subject* is rendered a target posited in epistemological relation to European patriarchal subjectivity.<sup>72</sup>

In *Veils*, having witnessed the *unveiling* of the woman in the marketplace, Vivian writes,



And I wondered... what would I be like? To be in that woman's place? Strangers appraising me, touching me, prodding me... treating me like an animal. Shuddering, I clutched Harry's arm. But I believe he took pleasure in my discomfort... or the spectacle in front of us... or both.<sup>73</sup>

Vivian's identification with the woman illustrates Yeğenoğlu's argument that the *unveiling* paradigm is deployed as a method of subject constitution.<sup>74</sup> The woman in the market is here rendered as Vivian's imaginary component, emphatically suggested in her speculation about what it would be like to be in the woman's place. In the scenes described, Vivian partakes in an ambivalent identification with the *Muslim female subject* as Other.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, the notion of subject constitution and its alignment with the *Muslim female subject* and her *unveiling* is central to this scene, for Vivian is situated as the 'civilized' subject, possessed of reason and knowledge, before the woman, who in contrast is treated like an animal and upheld as an object of curiosity. This deliberation is further extended in this scene, where the *Muslim female subject* is posited, to use Yeğenoğlu's term, as a 'target' in the process through which the 'Orientalist's production of identity through difference' is engendered. The final frame emphasizes this point where it reveals Vivian and Harry clutching each other as they stare at the *unveiled* woman, who is presented as an exterior target on stage (Figure 2.14). The notion of subject constitution is then underscored in Vivian's aligning her husband's pleasure alongside her own discomfort. Furthermore, the couple's subjectivity is distinguished as sovereign in relation to the *Muslim female subject*, who is rendered as a 'spectacle' in the accompanying caption.





Figure 2.14: *Veils* (1999)

In my introduction I discussed how Fanon's assertion that 'the body of the young Algerian woman ... is revealed to her by its coming to maturity and by the veil' is censured by Zayzafoon for constituting a 'patriarchal claim' in the way it situates the *veil* 'as a constitutive element of the Algerian woman's corporeal pattern.'<sup>76</sup> As argued, whilst Fanon's observation is fraught for the way it posits the *veil* as an element inherent to the body of the Algerian woman, it nonetheless remains valuable since it is the point from which the discursive structure of the *Muslim female body* is delivered, that is, as the 'interior that needs to be protected or penetrated.'<sup>77</sup> Following this, therefore, Fanon's appraisal serves to underscore the discursive production of the *Muslim female body* with reference to the cultural violence of colonialism, where, in this context, as Yeğenoğlu writes, *unveiling* the *Muslim female subject* is not 'simply an uncovering, or change of dress, *but peeling her skin off*.'<sup>78</sup>

Fanon extends his argument concerning the discursivity of the *Muslim female body* as a result of *unveiling* by asserting that the 'absence of the veil distorts the Algerian woman's corporeal pattern'; *unveiled*, she 'experiences a sense of incompleteness ...



of disintegration,' now having to invent 'new dimensions of her body, new means of muscular control.'<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, however, Khanna attributes a comparable reading to the *unveiling* scene in *The Battle of Algiers*, where she reads disintegration before the mirror as an effect of *unveiling*, herein supporting her contention concerning Fanon's influence upon the film, for the women 'lack the completeness of the image that they desire to create, and like the child in the Lacanian mirror, they must (re-)learn a different muscular control.'<sup>80</sup>

In relation to this scene, Robert Stam and Louise Spence argue that 'the *mise-en-scène*' creates a non-sexist and anti-colonialist variant on the classic cinematic *topos*,' where the mirror is no longer rendered an 'instrument of *vanitas* but a revolutionary tool.'<sup>81</sup> They further contend that the French colonialist myth of 'assimilation' is here demystified, since the first woman who appears, Hassiba, is a reminder of the cinematic representation of Arab women who function as a sign of the exotic whilst remaining *veiled*.<sup>82</sup> Once the women *unveil*, Stam and Spence suggest that they 'transform themselves into Europeans, people with whom the cinema more conventionally allows the audience to identify.'<sup>83</sup> Thus, whilst they claim this is indicative of an incongruous system where 'people warrant respect only if they look and act like Europeans,' they nonetheless view it as positive, since it 'exploits the conventional identification mechanisms on behalf of a group traditionally denied them.'<sup>84</sup> In 'The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,' Homi K. Bhabha criticizes their essay, contending that although they outline the fact that the stereotype may be read differently '*at*

*other times and places,*' they nevertheless over-simplify the process of stereotypical representation in their central claim about the politics of point-of-view:

They operate a passive and unitary notion of suture which simplifies the politics and 'aesthetics' of spectator-positioning by ignoring the ambivalent, psychical process of identification which is crucial to the argument. In contrast, I suggest, ... that the stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation as anxious as it is assertive which demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself.<sup>85</sup>

Stam and Spence's argument suggests that identification is only offered at the point at which the women look European. In other words, the women when *veiled* function as a sign of the exotic, and it is only when they are *unveiled* that they are endowed with subjectivity through suture. Drawing on Bhabha's argument, I shall illustrate how the process of identification with the Algerian women operates within a more complex framework than the *veiled/not veiled* (or rather, Arab/European) opposition that Stam and Spence propound. I shall then extend this argument to demonstrate how their rendition of the *veiled* Algerian woman as a sign of the exotic can be deemed reductive.

In *The Battle of Algiers*, the *unveiling* scenario is akin to the scene of castration, most prominently suggested through continual references to the scissors with which Hassiba cuts her hair, alongside the women's direct gazes and fragmented reflections in the mirror, which is also the filmic screen. Indeed, it could be said that the women



are represented in this scene as an exterior threat to the viewer; their intense gazes in the mirror (screen) are, as Khanna writes, 'turned in toward the self':

These Medusas in the mirror, who will wield scissors to cut their own hair, who will merge flesh with stone, see this uncanny reflection of themselves which is the new imago.<sup>86</sup>

To this effect, Yeğenoğlu's assertion that 'the *veiled* Muslim woman' is rendered 'an object of curiosity or marvel, and "an exterior threat"' resonates in the act of *unveiling*.<sup>87</sup> This is further underscored by the fact that the scene immediately before ends with the sound of ululations, which are then repeated at the end of the film where the voiceover describes them as 'rhythmic and nightmarish.' Whilst Stam and Spence situate the moment when the women look European as the point of identification, it could be argued, however, that through *unveiling* a different notion of suture is offered, namely, the Orientalist's production of identity through difference. Stam and Spence notably exclude the act of *unveiling*, where the women simply 'look like Europeans' at the point at which they are no longer *veiled*. Counter to their argument, I suggest that if we were to take Hassiba *veiled* before the mirror (screen) as constituting a stereotype, as they contend, this representation does not necessarily cease at the point at which she is no longer *veiled*, but rather is extended, if not reinforced, throughout an eighty seconds long process of *unveiling*. As established earlier, in the opening scene of *Veils*, the process of *unveiling* the woman in the marketplace is centralized, her *unveiled* face and body positioned as a denouement within the narrative structure and reinforced in the line, 'She was a remarkably beautiful creature.' References to the man's hand and the *veil* within the



frame further highlight the centrality of the act of *unveiling* in the construction of the *Muslim female subject* as stereotype.

In *The Battle of Algiers*, the extra-diegetic sound of percussions that accompanies the *unveiling* scenario refers to the theme of revolutionary warfare since it is repeatedly heard throughout the narrative as we witness Algerians firing guns and planting bombs against the French occupation. Whilst its use in this scene serves to underscore Pontecorvo's positioning of the Algerian woman in the anti-colonial struggle, it simultaneously presents the process of *unveiling* as a performance, further intensified through the cuts to close-up shots and mirrors (refer to Figure 2.8). In the first shot Hassiba appears *veiled*, removes her *haïk* before the mirror and enters the next shot *unveiled* (BA.8.1-3). The succeeding shot presents the second woman facing the mirror and brushing her hair, whilst the third woman who enters the shot removes her *haïk* as she appears in the mirror's reflection (BA.9.1-3). After this, Hassiba appears again within the frame, where the shot presents the construction of three *unveiled* women looking into the mirror. The two shots here described present the process of *unveiling* in its totality, where the three women are fragmented into *veiled* (Hassiba), *unveiled* and *unveiling*. The process of *unveiling*, therefore, is captured in a reflection through the mirror and the filmic screen. Alongside the paradigm of *unveiling*, the fact that the three women enact this process as a group in a room recalls the *harīm* and the '*seraglio*,' which continues to align the representations of the *Muslim female subject* with a sense of interiority.<sup>88</sup> Significantly, the first time that an Algerian woman, Fatiha, is represented in the film without the *haïk*, she appears in reflection before the mirror as she prepares for



her wedding (BA.39) (refer to Figure 2.15). Given Pontecorvo's familiarity with the Fanonian debate on the *veil*, the *unveiled* Algerian woman shown in a reflection arguably stands as a reference to the colonial myth of assimilation and the contention that the '*occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria.*'



Figure 2.15: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

In their interpretation of the stereotype, Stam and Spence deliver the opposition of *veiled* and not *veiled* as result of the women's transformation. This reading notably downplays the significance of the act of *unveiling*, which is not only accentuated through being rendered theatrical via the sound of percussions and stylistic techniques, but is visually encapsulated in varying stages before the mirror. Stam and Spence thus exclude the crucial fact that the *unveiled Muslim female subject* and the process of *unveiling* itself both contribute to the construction of the *Muslim female subject* as stereotype.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, in discounting the act of *unveiling* in their discussion, they fail to acknowledge the magnitude of the ideological doctrine of *unveiling* within this colonial field. Their argument, therefore, that 'the *mise-en-scène* creates a non-sexist and anti-colonialist variant on the classic cinematic *topos*,' where the mirror is rendered 'a revolutionary tool,' is here utterly inverted, for Pontecorvo encapsulates the process of *unveiling* directly through the mirror (screen), such that the French colonialist myth of 'assimilation' is not 'demystified' but rather continues to be upheld.<sup>90</sup>



In the opening pages of *The Colonial Harem*, Alloula declares that his reproduction of colonial postcards is an attempt 'to return this immense postcard to its sender.'<sup>91</sup>

He writes that,

To track, then, through the colonial representations of the Algerian women – the figures of a phantasm – is to attempt a double operation: first, to uncover the nature and the meaning of the colonialist gaze; then, to subvert the stereotype that is so tenaciously attached to the bodies of women.<sup>92</sup>

Feminist critics have attacked *The Colonial Harem* for re-appropriating the pornographic by aesthetisizing exploitative and erotic images of Algerian women.<sup>93</sup>

In 'Unveiling Algeria,' for example, Winifred Woodhull argues that, nearly twenty years after independence, 'Alloula repeats the gesture of the colonizer by making the veiled woman the screen on which he projects *his* fantasy.'<sup>94</sup> Like Pontecorvo, Alloula was familiar with the Fanonian argument as regards the politicization of the *veil* and its 'historic dynamism' in the Franco-Algerian context. It could thus be argued that in the same manner as Alloula's analysis discerns, as Woodhull writes, the 'contradictions that are specific to the photographic medium in the colonial situation,' Pontecorvo's *unveiling* scenario before the mirror similarly renders this representation a repetition of 'the gesture of the colonizer,' wherein their reflection becomes 'the screen on which he projects *his* fantasy.' Elsewhere in her essay, Woodhull refers to Barthes' observation, referenced by Alloula himself, that,



the age of photography corresponds exactly to the irruption of the private into the public, or rather, to the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such publicly.<sup>95</sup>

The *unveiling* scenario concludes with a freeze frame of Hassiba dying her hair before the mirror, followed by the camera zooming into her frozen image (BA.16) [refer to Figure 2.8]. This technique is repeated throughout the film and most notably evinced when the French soldiers arrest the innocent man. This scene begins and ends by reinforcing the Algerian man's isolation through the lens zooming into his face, further enclosing him in a diminishing interior (BA.29, BA.32) [refer to Figure 2.10]. As established, Pontecorvo's aesthetic discourse aligns the notion of interiority with the *Muslim female subject*, who simultaneously constitutes a sacred and forbidden space reminiscent of the *harīm*. Drawing on Woodhull, it could be argued that, with his aesthetic discourse constituting the *Muslim female subject* as a forbidden and thus private space, the filmic screen and the zoom lens are here rendered the means through which the private is publicized, so that the *unveiled* Algerian women are 'consumed as such publicly.'

The zoom lens further contributes to Pontecorvo's aesthetic and spatial gendering of the Casbah, which lies within the porno-tropic tradition described earlier. The penetrative metaphors that are enacted through the French soldiers infiltration into the Casbah are here further produced in the manner in which his zoom lens penetrates into the interior space of the colonized and the forbidden space of the *unveiled Muslim female subject*. Thus, Fanon's contention that, 'every face that offered itself to the bold and impatient glance of the occupier was a negative



expression of the fact that Algeria ... was accepting the rape of the colonizer' is in this instance enacted by Pontecorvo himself, where the combination of the photographic apparatus alongside the scene of *unveiling* renders his zoom lens a form of ocular rape. Indeed, his representation of the *unveiled Muslim female subject* can be likened to what Woodhull condemns in Alloula's work, namely that,

This dream of transparency and possession places the photographer in solidarity with the colonial administration whose principled denunciation of the veil (the symbol of women's oppression) is belied by its policies.<sup>96</sup>

In a similar indictment of Alloula's project, Rey Chow asserts that, despite its anti-imperialist objective, the images are 'exposed a second time and made to stand as a transparent medium ... connecting "third world" nationalism to "first world" imperialism.'<sup>97</sup> She adds,

What results is neither a dismantling of the pornographic apparatus of imperialist domination nor a restoration of the native to her 'authentic' history but a perfect symmetry between the imperialist and anti-imperialist gazes, which cross over the images of native women as silent objects.<sup>98</sup>

This is invaluable in as far as aesthetic renditions of the *Muslim female subject* are concerned, for whilst *The Colonial Harem* is pornographic in the literal sense, the intersection of imperialist and anti-imperialist gazes identified by Chow is continually replicated in the contemporary field of cultural practice. Perhaps the most illustrative example in this context is *Femme Algériennes* (1960) by French photographer Marc Garanger, which presents a series of black and white portraits of



Algerian women with their faces exposed to the camera. Garanger confesses how he took these pictures under duress during his military service in Algeria and that they were intended for French identity cards during the occupation, which the authorities decided that the natives should carry so their movements could be more easily controlled:

It was the faces of the women that struck me most. They had no choice. They were forced to unveil and be photographed ... They glared at me from point-blank range; I was the first to witness their silent but fierce protest. In return, I want my photographs to bear witness to them.<sup>99</sup>

What is problematic in this instance is the way in which the context and narrative of these photographs are undermined, not only in the fact that they are publicly displayed but also in the way they were presented in the exhibition *Veil*, which toured the United Kingdom in 2003, and its catalogue. In both instances Garanger's statement is displayed in the form of a letter alongside the images, herein contextualizing the violence of colonialism located in his work. Though the intention here is anti-imperialist, this is notably undermined by the fact that his black and white photographs are highly aestheticized, occupying full-length glossy pages that run throughout the catalogue and can be likened to the formatting and display of Alloula's publication, which is marked out by a distinctive 'coffee table book' quality. Furthermore, one of these photographs was used both in the exhibition's advertising campaign and on the cover of the catalogue, exemplifying once again, as established in my introduction, the marketability of the *veil* through the manner in which the *Muslim female subject* is rendered central to the composition, with the



title, *Veil*, magnified and contrasted in bold red print against the existing black and white backdrop (Figure 2.16). Despite denouncing the violence of colonialism throughout its catalogue, which engages at length with the Fanonian debate on the *veil* and references essays by postcolonial scholars Reina Lewis and Leila Ahmed, the exhibition nevertheless privileges aesthetics to the extent that it significantly underplays the effects of patriarchal and colonial domination.

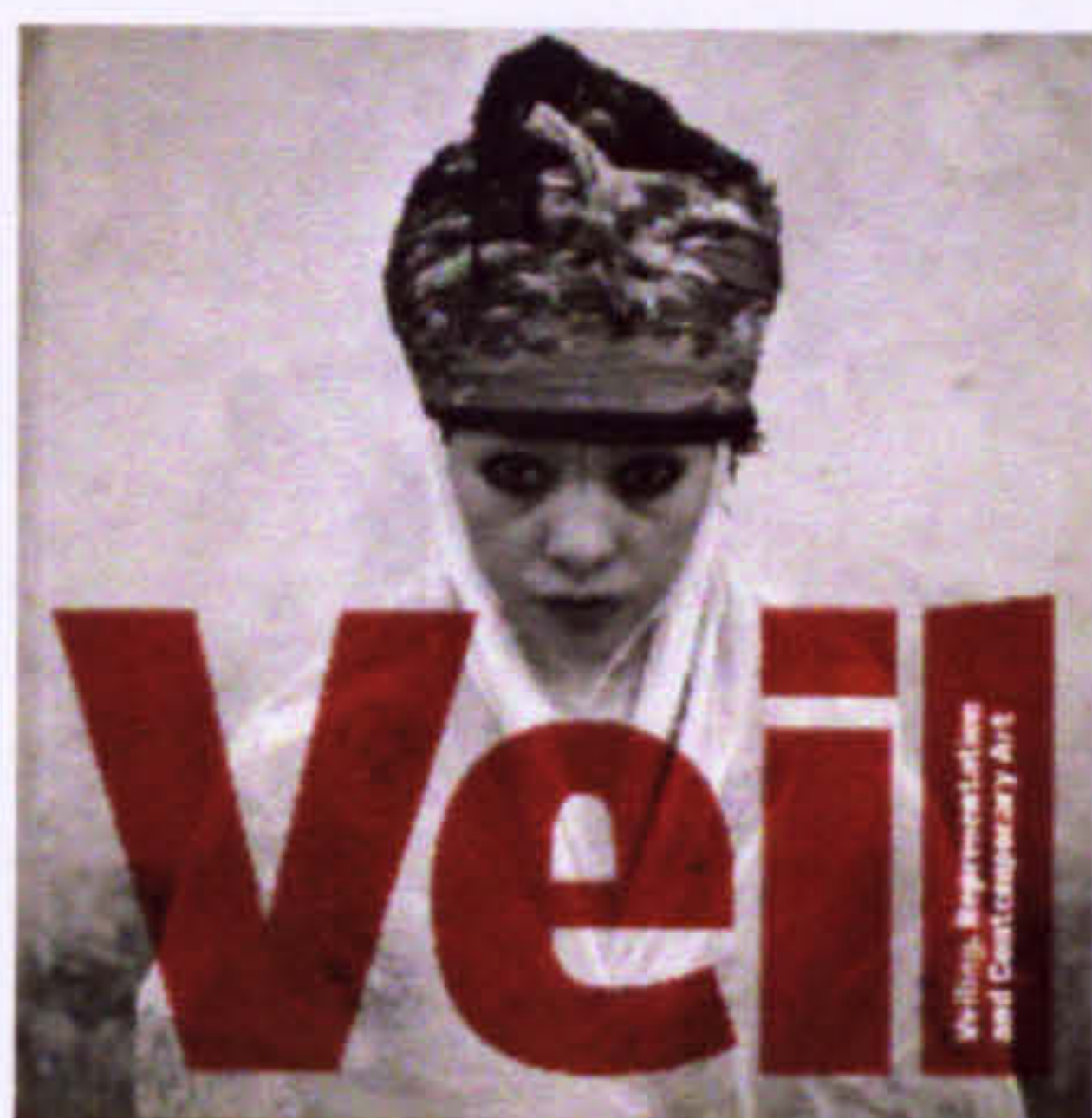


Figure 2.16: *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art* (2003)

In a fierce assault on Alloula, Chow suggests that an alternative to reproducing the images would be to describe them in the text; she condemns not only the violence involved in his re-appropriation of erotic images, but also the restorative intention of the project as a whole.<sup>100</sup> She remains sceptical of attempts to pursue the ‘reinvention of subjectivity,’ and of discourses which provide different ‘ways of watching *that would change the image*.’<sup>101</sup> She thus argues,

Because the image, in which the other is often cast, is always distrusted as illusion, deception, and falsehood, attempts to salvage the other often turn into attempts to uphold the other as the non-duped – the site of authenticity and true knowledge. Critics who do this also imply that, having absorbed the primal wisdoms, they are the non-duped themselves ... My argument is: yes, ‘natives’ are represented as defiled images – that is the fact of our history. But must we represent them a second time by turning history ‘upside down,’



this time giving them the sanctified status of the 'non-duped'? Defilement and sanctification belong to the same symbolic order.<sup>102</sup>

Chow's wariness of restorative efforts is particularly pertinent in light of the works discussed thus far, not only because of the manner in which 'defiled images' are here re-appropriated as a result, but also because of the way in which the violence of colonialism is confronted through the medium of the defiled image itself. Khanna cites that the Third Cinema manifesto 'calls for a dismantling of the hegemony of Hollywood cinema, in the name of a political cinema of decolonisation.'<sup>103</sup> *The Battle of Algiers* as referenced in the article by Stam and Spence, 'presents guerrilla insurrection as a response to colonial oppression.'<sup>104</sup> Garanger similarly labels his photographs a response to colonialism when he writes, 'In return, I want my photographs to bear witness to them.'<sup>105</sup> With this in mind, Mohanty's criticism of Foucault's power/resistance paradigm, discussed in my Introduction, is once again relevant, for the way Alloula, Garanger and Pontecorvo confront the violence of colonialism as a 'return,' sustains the hegemony of colonial power by upholding the very apparatus through which violence is engendered. This mode of criticism not only emerges as an exercise of power in discourse but furthermore maintains colonizer/colonized connections.

*Veil* (1997) by the Iraqi/Irish Jananne Al-Ani provides yet another example of a restorative project that unwittingly employs the paradigm of *unveiling* (Figure 2.17). This work is described by David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros, curators of *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art* (inIVA, 2003), as suggesting that 'historical narrative is a differently articulated and fragmented activity made up of



an assemblage of individual experiences,' where 'five women of different ages appear veiled, unveiled and re-veiled to different degrees.'<sup>106</sup> They add, 'It is hard to extricate the veil from this history since, as Leila Ahmed points out, the discourses of feminism, of colonialism and of indigenous resistance gradually became deeply intertwined.'<sup>107</sup> *Untitled* (1996) by Al-Ani also depicts the historical narrative of the *veil* through black and white photography (Figure 2.17). Whilst in *Veil* a single image depicts a headshot of five women, the five women in *Untitled* appear seated and *veiled* to different degrees over two consecutive photographs. In these works, Al-Ani attempts to capture the semiotic mutability of the *veil*, or rather, its historical narrative as articulated through a spectrum of different perspectives.

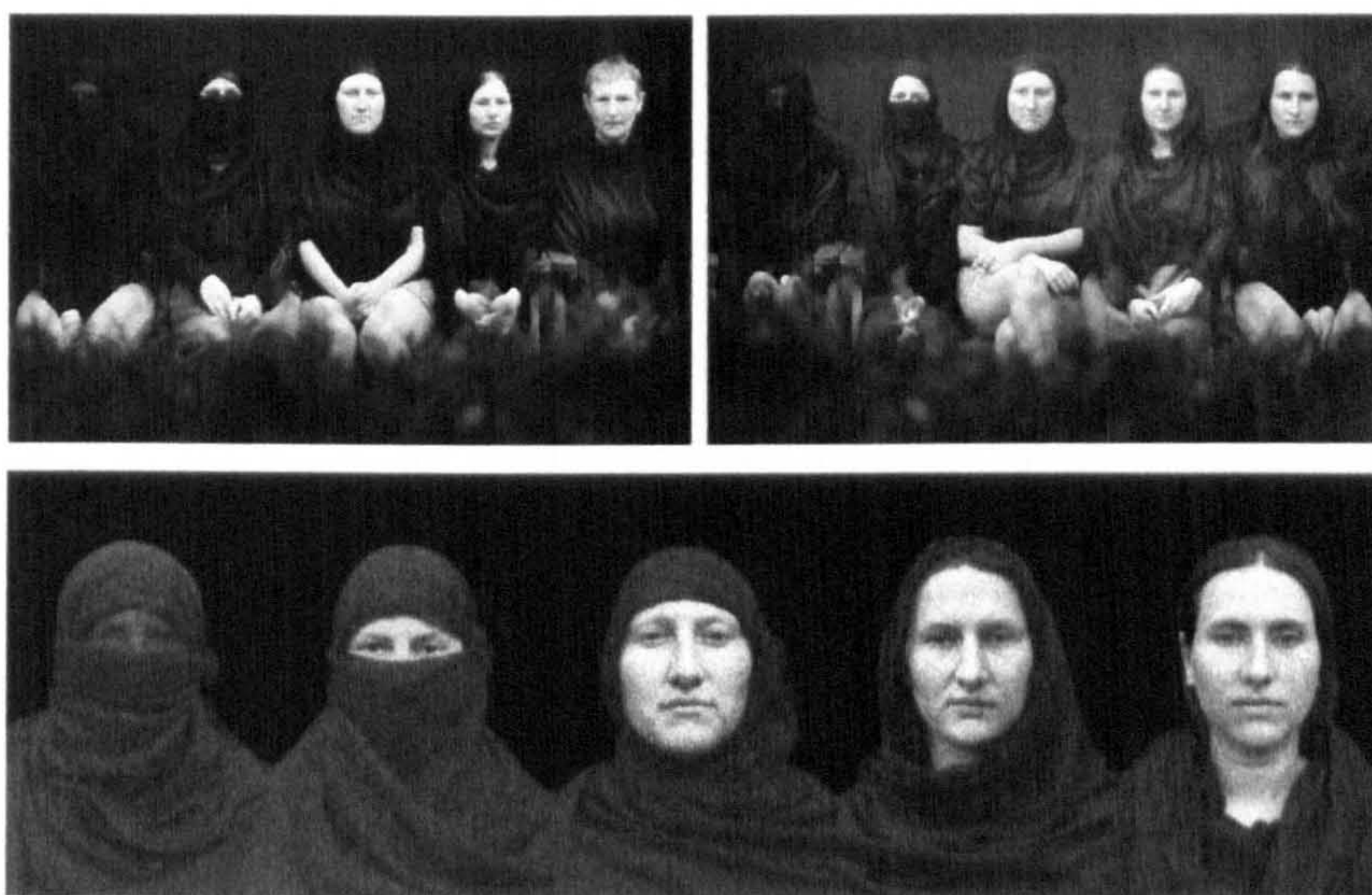


Figure 2.17: *Veil* (1997); *Untitled* (1996)

In her contribution to the exhibition catalogue, Al-Ani argues that in order to understand the legacy of the material that has survived from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries 'which acts as springboard for many of the artists in this exhibition,' it is integral to revisit 'the history of European imperialism in the Middle East and North Africa.'<sup>108</sup> She explains that, implicit within the late



nineteenth century tradition of European photography was the desire to record both the biblical landscape and the local populace, especially the women, with stylistic emphasis on formal posing and staging.<sup>109</sup>

Though Al-Ani's statement here is intended to shed light on her aesthetic discourse, more importantly it exposes a fundamental contradiction between her purpose and her practice. In her essay she remains critical of 'the relationship between the photographer, the stage and the actors' in this tradition, but interestingly they are simultaneously the very ingredients by which *Veil* (1997) and *Untitled* (1996) are constituted.<sup>110</sup> Although these works do not necessarily comprise an autobiographical document, the five women who appear in them are in fact the artist, her three sisters and mother. Significantly, Al-Ani does not declare this information alongside the photographs, herein rendering the autobiographical element in her work unexplicated. It could be argued, however, that the relationship between the specific three elements reinforced in her essay are further brought to the fore through the underlying theme of autobiography in both works.

Whilst the photographs present a staged construction of the narrative of the *veil* in different stages through the use of actors, the photographer and the studio, the autobiographical aspect serves to connect these elements in Al-Ani herself, who appears in these works, appropriating the status of the *Muslim female subject*. In other words, Al-Ani's role as artist and her appearance in her work draws specific attention to the fact that these photographs are staged performances. In *Untitled*, for example, having the five women seated alongside each other emphasizes the notion



of the stage, which is central to the tradition of which she purports to be critical, while her appearance alongside her family further accentuates the role of the actors. These two features are linked to the third element of this tradition, that is, the role of the photographer, in this case Al-Ani herself, who hereby renders the three elements she discusses in her essay as equally central to her aesthetic practice.

In this sense, Al-Ani's retort to the European Imperialist project in the Middle East and North Africa, referred to above, is undermined, most detrimentally by her awareness of the necessity of staging and performance as integral elements in this particular tradition. This contradiction is further heightened by the praise in her essay for the French psychiatrist Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault, whose photographs she applauds for their variation from 'Orientalist stereotyping' by being taken 'in genuine interiors, unlike the stage set of the commercial photographic studio.'<sup>111</sup> In her own work, however, Al-Ani's stagings of the *Muslim female subject* are situated against the backdrop of the photographic studio, in stark opposition to her appreciation for Clérambault's use of 'genuine' interiors. Moreover, Al-Ani praises the fact that, 'in contrast to the dominant imagery of women becoming increasingly revealed to the extreme of nakedness, the women Clérambault photographs become increasingly hidden by the veil.'<sup>112</sup>

Crucially, however, her criticism of a tradition fixated on revealing the *Muslim female Subject* is overturned in *Veil*, which presents five women increasingly exposed through a process of *unveiling*. Similarly, in *Untitled* the process of *unveiling* from left to right continues, with the final figures in each case being the



most revealed. Furthermore, the body of the third woman in both images is most 'revealed to nakedness.' Her centrality in these constructions is heightened by the fact that she is the only figure who does not change position within the frames, unlike the surrounding women who appear in a different order. The centrality of this figure, whose body is most exposed, alongside the process of *unveiling* consistent in both works, counteracts Al-Ani's appreciation of Clérambault's resistant representations of the *Muslim female subject* and renders her aesthetic discourse in contradiction to her critical stance. Despite denouncing both the stagings of Orientalism and its fixation on the *Muslim female subject*, Al-Ani nevertheless resorts to staging herself and the women in her family in a re-enactment of the very tradition she attacks in her essay, the title of which, 'Acting Out,' embodies the fantasies of Orientalism that are soon after relayed in her own aesthetic discourse. Though the intention here is both anti-imperialist and anti-patriarchal, *Veil* and *Untitled* nonetheless prove disconcerting in their re-appropriation of the late nineteenth century tradition of European photography as Al-Ani inscribes 'the need for formal posing and staging' in her attempt to record the semiotic mutability of the *veil*.<sup>113</sup>

In as far as my argument relates to the question of the restorative projects that Chow outlines, I maintain the view that images of the *Muslim female subject* are not inherently defiled, but rather that defilement is constituted through both the paradigmatic context in which they are inscribed and, more importantly, within the discursive apparatus through which they are executed. Often in the ensuing chapters I am myself implicated in this very site, reproducing images to illustrate my



argument. Whilst this was considered necessary for the purpose of this study, the challenge for me at a later stage would be to attempt to translate such illustrations textually to circumvent the repetition of their exploitative power as image.

**Does the *Veil* Tell the Woman's Story?**  
***Veiling* as Derivative Discourse and the Question of Female Agency**

In their seminal work *Women–Nation–State*, Nira Yuval-Davis and Flórida Anthias identify the different ways that women participate in ethnic processes.<sup>114</sup> They argue that, in as far as women are ‘signifiers of ethnic/national difference,’ they ‘do not teach and transfer the cultural and ideological traditions of ethnic and national groups’ but rather ‘very often they constitute their actual symbolic figuration.’<sup>115</sup> In a scene in *The Battle of Algiers*, Ali La Pointe looks for Hassan as we witness the corruption of the Casbah by ‘foreign values’ such as alcohol, drugs and prostitution (BA.40-1) (refer to Figure 2.18). It opens with a woman attacking a drunken man in the street and closes as another woman enters the frame to the sound of the call to prayer (BA.42-3). In these shots, Algerian women stand in stark contrast to dissolute ‘foreign values,’ where Pontecorvo renders the *Muslim female subject* a metonym for tradition. Moreover, in placing the *haïk* alongside the extra-diegetic sound of the call to prayer the concluding shot situates the *Muslim female subject* as a metonym for Islam.<sup>116</sup> In this gesture, Pontecorvo illustrates Yuval-Davis’ and Anthias’ contention by positing the *Muslim female subject* as the symbolic figuration of ethnic/national difference in the anti-colonial struggle, where she stands in direct opposition to the cultural infiltration of the French occupation.



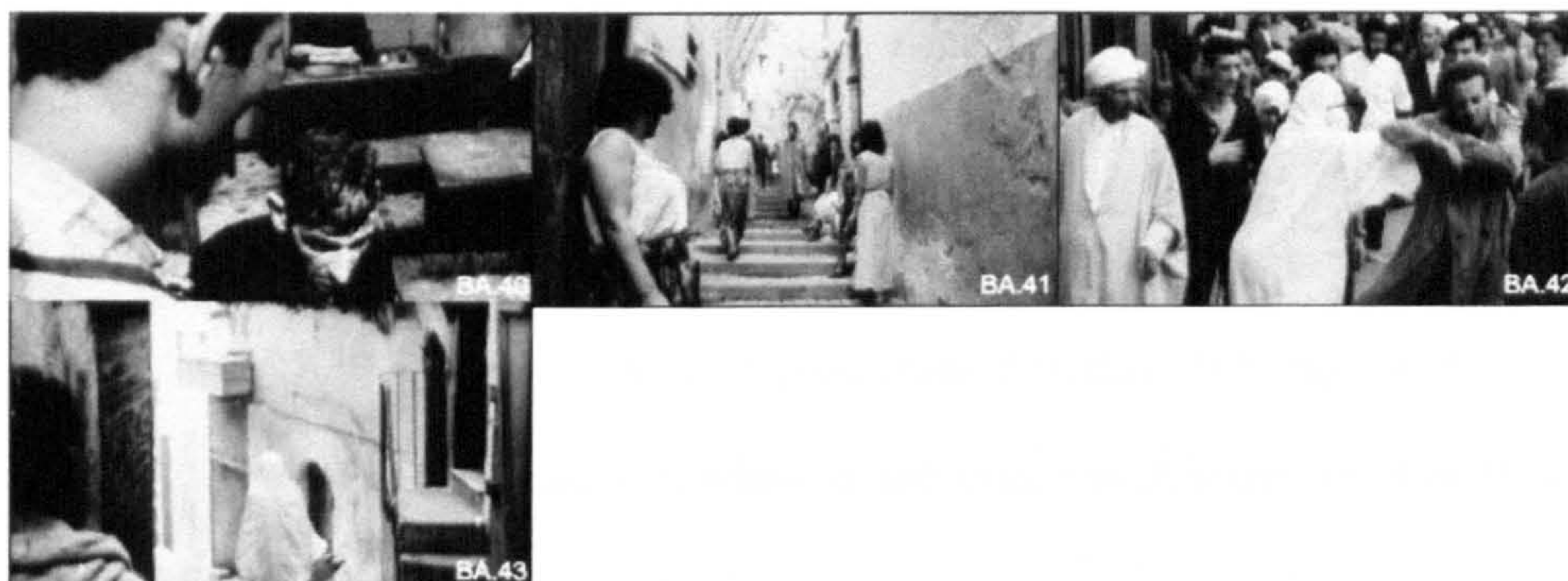


Figure 2.18: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

In her discussion of the fractious relationship between cultural change and modernity in the postcolonial world in *Gender and Nation*, Yuval-Davis explains how cultural and religious traditions were upheld as ‘symbolic border guards’ in the development of ethnic and national projects.<sup>117</sup> What was deemed symbolic of modernity in previous projects was here posited as cultural imperialism, giving rise to a ‘fundamentalist construction of “the true” cultural essence of the collectivity.’<sup>118</sup> Within this framework women no longer symbolized change but rather performed a crucial function as ‘the “carriers of tradition.”’<sup>119</sup> Yuval-Davis extends her argument with reference to the debate on the *veil*, explaining how the emphasis on *unveiling* in the emancipatory project was superseded by the implementation of *veiling* by the state. Woman was thus presented as ‘a mirror to the colonial gaze,’ whose ideology was fixated on these very practices in the construction of difference.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, Fanon writes that the *veil* was first worn because ‘tradition demanded the rigid separation of the sexes’ but later re-affirmed through resistance to the occupier, who ‘was bent on unveiling Algeria.’<sup>121</sup> Ahmed’s discussion of the debate on the *veil* in the context of British colonial Egypt similarly engages with the way *veiling* was engendered within nationalism as a discourse directly derived from the colonial



project. She argues that the colonialist appraisal of the *veil* as representative of Islamic barbarity was overturned by a narrative which asserted 'the dignity and validity of all native customs ... relating to women,' with *veiling* emerging in resistance to Western rule.<sup>122</sup> Ahmed propounds that this shift can be deemed a prototype of the debate on the *veil*, which is articulated in different ways in Muslim countries time and again.<sup>123</sup>

In examining Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, Yeğenoğlu remarks that he observes a fundamental contradiction in nationalist ideology, namely that, 'while it aspires to become modern ... at the same time it asserts its autonomous identity by claiming an authentic, pure, and uncontaminated origin. It therefore simultaneously accepts and refutes the epistemic and moral dominance of the West.'<sup>124</sup> Drawing on this, she contends within the context of Algerian de-colonial nationalism that women 'occupied a dubious place' by embodying the very essence of Algerian culture:

the struggle over this authentic essence was fought over women's bodies; it was onto her veiled body that both French colonialism and Algerian patriarchy projected their fears, desires, and policies. The veil became a potent symbol in this battle.<sup>125</sup>

This contradiction is realized in the closing sequence of *The Battle of Algiers*, which reveals Algerian protesters in conflict with French soldiers (BA.44) (refer to Figure 2.19). The scene is interrupted twice with panoramic shots of the Casbah accompanied by the continued sound of ululations (BA.45). The sound is repeated as we are shown a group of women protesting, one of whom waves the Algerian flag.



Repeated shots of the protesters follow, with defiantly demonstrating women, filmed in medium close-up, dominating the sequence (BA.46). The woman waving her flag appears in close-up walking towards the French soldiers, who try to stop her (BA.47). The voiceover explains that on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 1962, independence was won as the woman wields the Algerian flag. Alongside this image, the voiceover announces that the Algerian nation was born and the film ends (BA.48).



Figure 2.19: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

This scene presents the theme of national liberation through the feminine, situating Algerian women as a dominant feature within the sequence. The repeated sound of ululations alongside the shots that present the landscape of the Casbah, constituting the feminine in the gendered spatial mapping of *The Battle of Algiers*, further underscores the rendition of woman as the symbolic representation of the national collective. This alignment recalls Mellen's assertion that Pontecorvo renders 'woman as a symbol of Algeria and of the national spirit.'<sup>126</sup>

The scene also relates to Yeğenoğlu's analysis, where the relationship between French colonialism and Algerian patriarchy with reference to the *veil* is subtly manifest in its concluding shots. For example, at the beginning of the sequence the



group of women who appear protesting do not wear the *haïk*, yet as it progresses others who do wear it appear amongst them (BA.49) (refer to Figure 2.20). The camera then pans across the right-hand side of the frame as we witness women who do not wear the *haïk* (BA.50). Within this shot, two women appear dominant within the frame. The woman in the backdrop wears a face *veil* and waves what appears to be a *haïk* in the air; the woman in the foreground appears in ‘Western dress’ and waves the Algerian flag as an expression of her protest, followed by a medium close-up shot of her (BA.51). The sequence continues by cutting to her in close-up waving her flag, followed by a shot of the protestors in close-up, with recurring images of the flag and the *haïk*, moving within the frame (BA.52-4). The concluding shots of the sequence where the women defy the French soldiers by continuing to protest reveals a close-up shot of the woman who waves her flag and does not wear the *haïk*, who is shown again in the final image of the film (BA.47-48) (refer to Figure 2.19).



Figure 2.20: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

This sequence primarily encapsulates the theme of national liberation through a metaphoric rendition of woman as the nation of Algeria, herein further reinforced in the alignment between the *haïk* and the flag and their movement within the frame



(BA.52). In situating the Algerian woman as a dominant feature within this sequence, Pontecorvo also reveals a subtle engagement with the politics of dress. It could be said that within the sequence of shots that show the protestors, women are distinguished in the crowd by being continually referenced and in the sound of ululations which foreground their prominence within the demonstration. However, Pontecorvo also distinguishes between the women themselves – between those in the backdrop who wear the *haïk* and those in the foreground who do not. This juxtaposition of *haïks* and western dress serves to enact the way, identified by Yeğenoğlu, that Algerian patriarchy and French colonialism projected their policies upon the Algerian woman. In view of this scene, therefore, where does the question of female agency lie in *The Battle of Algiers*?

Fanon writes that the ‘veil helped the Algerian woman to meet the new problems created by the struggle.’<sup>127</sup> Yeğenoğlu extends this contention and similarly attributes the affirmation of the *veil* in the anti-colonial struggle as the means through which Algerian women asserted their subjectivity and agency.<sup>128</sup> In embracing the *veil* ‘as a constituent symbolic element of their subjectivity,’ she argues, Algerian women did not simply continue their traditional roles, because the *veil* was ‘reinscribed and recharged,’ transformed into ‘the *embodiment of their will to act, their agency*.’<sup>129</sup> As established throughout this essay, Pontecorvo’s referencing of the *veil* in the Algerian contest is akin to the Fanonian thesis on the ‘historic dynamism’ of the *veil*. The director’s politicization of the *veil* as an entity which endows agency and subjectivity is manifest throughout his narrative, which assigns the *haïk* a place within the anti-colonial struggle. This fact is heightened in a



scene in which Ali and his gang disguise themselves as women by donning the *haïk* and hiding their guns underneath it in order to pass the French checkpoints untouched. McClintock argues that Fanon situates women as ‘symbolic mediators’ and ‘boundary markers of an agon that is fundamentally male,’ for indeed he writes, ‘The young Algerian woman establishes a link.’<sup>130</sup> Moreover, given his explication that the revolution ‘is without apprenticeship, without briefing,’ she avers that, ‘Algerian women are not self-motivating agents nor do they have prior histories or consciousness of the revolt from which they draw.’<sup>131</sup> In ‘Algeria Unveiled,’ she asserts, women’s agency is designated by men since it did not exist before the revolution.<sup>132</sup>

Indeed, this is manifested visually in *The Battle of Algiers* most illustratively the first time the *Muslim female subject* is referenced, where she is posited in the backdrop of the frame; Ali’s acknowledgment of her through nodding his head and her subsequent movement demonstrates that her agency is assigned and activated by his invitation only. This dynamic is repeatedly illustrated throughout the film, where women hide guns under their *haïks* before passing them to the men and shielding them while they shoot. Furthermore, the end of the *unveiling* scenario further posits female agency as designated by men. After the women disguise themselves a shot reveals them in a staged pose as they wait to receive instructions to bomb the French quarters from the men (BA.56) (refer to Figure 2.21). In *The Battle of Algiers*, it could be said that the *veil* itself endows the colonized subject with an agency to act, regardless of gender. In as far as the Algerian woman is concerned, however, female agency continues to be designated by men.





Figure 2.21: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

Regarding Pontecorvo's cinematic discourse, Stam and Spence's contention that identification is offered only at the point at which the women look European further informs the question of female agency in the film. Indeed, Mellen asserts that the three women are not introduced until the *unveiling* scenario and the audience is given no information about them till this time.<sup>133</sup> In fact, we only learn their names once the act of *unveiling* is completed. Pontecorvo introduces Fatiha in a similar manner: not wearing the *haïk*, she appears in reflection in the mirror before her wedding ceremony when her name is then mentioned. Thus, although Algerian women wearing the *haïk* possess an agency designated by men, Pontecorvo nonetheless endows them with a privileged subjectivity and an agency when they are not wearing the *haïk*. *Pépé Le Moko* reveals a similar attitude since women who do not wear the *haïk*, like Aicha, Innes and Gaby, speak, and their names are introduced; they are endowed with an agency and subjectivity – unlike the women who wear the *haïk* and who remain unnamed and silent throughout the narrative.

In the cinematic narratives discussed thus far, Fanon's contention that the *haïk* 'very clearly demarcates the Algerian colonized society' is manifest in both films primarily in the way in which *haïks* are repeatedly referenced within the frame.<sup>134</sup>



He further writes, however, that the *haïk* is 'a uniform which tolerates no modification, no variant,' thus echoing Duvivier's representation of native women in their *haïks* as being indistinguishable from each other.<sup>135</sup> In *The Battle of Algiers*, it could be said that Algerian women are distinguished from each other through dress, for Fatiha and the three women before the mirror are marked against other women either by *unveiling* or by not wearing the *haïk*. In *The Battle of Algiers*, the *haïk* is similarly rendered an entity which 'tolerates no modification,' with 'variation' possible only through its absence or the act of *unveiling*.

If we were to re-contextualize Gaines' contention that, 'if costume represents interiority, it is she who is turned inside out on screen,' it could be said that in his employment of the paradigm of *unveiling* Pontecorvo turns the *Muslim female subject* inside-out on screen. In light of Gaines' argument, the relationship between the *veil* and cinematic narrative reveals that in *Pépé Le Moko* the *veil* does not tell the woman's story since the Algerian woman has no story to tell. Rather, dress stands as a metonym for the Casbah, where the *Muslim female subject* is rendered an element of the *mise-en-scène*. In *The Battle of Algiers*, however, the agency ascribed by the *veil* signifies the agency of the Algerian anti-colonial struggle. Once again, the *veil* does not tell the woman's story but rather, with woman rendered a metaphor for the nation and the national spirit, dress tells the story of Algeria itself.

McClintock writes that 'Fanon ventriloquizes – only to refute – the long Western dream of colonial conquest as an erotics of ravishment.'<sup>136</sup> Drawing on this, Zayzafoon asserts that, in 'equating the violence of colonization with the rape of the



Algerian woman's body,' Fanon reproduces 'the patriarchal discourse of nationalism, where lands and women's bodies are presented as men's property.'<sup>137</sup> This criticism can also be levelled at Pontecorvo, whose aesthetic discourse is situated within the porno-tropic tradition that McClintock identifies. Furthermore, his alignment of the Algerian woman with national liberation in the final scene further underscores his reproduction of the patriarchal discourse of nationalism that Zayzafoon describes. It could also be claimed that in his metaphoric rendition of national independence through the Algerian woman, Pontecorvo privileges the *unveiled* over the *veiled*, particularly in his closing sequence. Here, his aesthetic discourse of liberation is arguably a reanimation of colonial rhetoric and ideology, reaffirming the doctrine of assimilation through *unveiling* the Algerian woman in his final shot. Moreover, the extra-diegetic sound of percussions heard in the scene in which the three women *unveil* before the mirror is repeated after the sound of ululations, thus conflating the colonizer's dream of *unveiling* (in the mirror) with a symbol of the birth of the nation. *The Battle of Algiers* begins by critiquing the colonial doctrine of assimilation through dress by presenting a scene in which French soldiers clothe an Algerian man in their uniform, where assimilation is presented as a violation (BA.57-8) (refer to Figure 2.22). Ironically, however, the same doctrine is reiterated upon the body of the Algerian woman in the final image of the film, in which a woman without the *haïk* brandishes the Algerian flag. Though born out of a cinematic genre that purports to refute colonial hegemony, the final image of *The Battle of Algiers* herein endorses the very principles it seeks to overturn. In employing the image of a woman who does not wear a *haïk* to embody



the birth of the nation, *Algeria is unveiled*, its ‘flesh ... laid bare,’ and the colonizer’s rape of the nation is accepted.<sup>138</sup>



Figure 2.22: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

<sup>1</sup> This title is taken from an advert for *Time Magazine* in *Business Week*, 20 September 2004: see Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 35–6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> I am herein indebted to McClintock, who argues that Fanon ‘recognizes the power of nationalism as a *scopic* politics,’ where ‘women serve as the visible markers of national homogeneity, they become subjected to especially vigilant and violent discipline. Hence the intense emotive politics of dress.’ McClintock (1995), p. 365.

<sup>6</sup> Fanon (1965), p. 36. In ‘Algeria Unveiled,’ Fanon defines the *haïk* as ‘the big square veil worn by Arab women, covering the face and the whole body’ (p. 36).

<sup>7</sup> Lowe (1991), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Said presents Orientalism as the West’s habitual representation of the Oriental world, which allows it both to constitute the Orient as other and to appropriate the Orient by speaking for it. Based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between the Orient and the Occident, Orientalism is a discourse which renders the Orient monolithic but at the same time anatomizes its parts, and by which the West restructures and dominates the Orient. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*: (London: Penguin, 1978). As Lowe notes, Said’s rendition of Orientalism as constant and monolithic has been subject to criticism from a number of scholars. Homi K. Bhabha observes in ‘The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonialist Discourse’ that ‘There is always in Said, the suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser, which is a historical and theoretical simplification.’ Lowe (1991), p. 4. Similarly, see James Clifford, ‘On *Orientalism*,’ in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 255–76. Alongside Lowe, other scholars who have criticized the homogeneity of *Orientalism* and in turn identified conflict and inherent divisions in the relationship between colonial discourse and gender include: Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996); Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991); Yeğenoğlu (1998). See also, Timothy Mitchell’s study which advocates a repositioning of the study of colonial history, Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991). Yeğenoğlu extends Mitchell’s thesis in relation to the *veil* and his argument that ‘Orientalism does not simply provide knowledge about Oriental societies, but is itself constitutive of “absolute differences” which enable the European to code the Oriental as his reverse image or as the exterior of the West. However, as Mitchell points out, what is outside is paradoxically what makes the West what it is, the excluded yet integral part of its identity and power.’ Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Lowe (1991), p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Ginette Vincendeau notes that 1931, the year of the Colonial Exhibition, and 1936, the year *Pépé Le Moko* was made, were peak years in French colonial film production: ‘Colonialism was very prominent in film at the time. North Africa was by far the most favoured colonial location, and was



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used in over half of the 85 or so French films of the 1930s set outside Western countries.' Ginette Vincendeau, *Pépé Le Moko* (London: BFI, 1998), p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Ranjana Khanna explains how *The Battle of Algiers* was born out of the cinematic movement of Third Cinema, or the cinema of decolonization, established by the Argentine directors Solanas and Getino in the late 1960s, which was directly concerned with political transformation in its reformulation of hegemonic ideologies, where the camera was perceived 'as a weapon in nationalist struggle and revolutionary violence.' Ranjana Khanna, 'The Battle of Algiers and The Nouba of the Women of Mont Chenoua: From Third to Fourth Cinema,' in *Third Text*, Volume 43 (Summer 1998), pp. 13–32, p. 13. On Third Cinema, see Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 'Towards a Third Cinema,' in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods Volume I: An Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 44–64. See also Robert Stam and Louise Spence, 'Colonialism, Racism and Representation: An Introduction,' in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods Volume II: An Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 632–49.

<sup>12</sup> Jane Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story,' in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, eds., *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 180–211, p. 181.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> According to Gaines, a phrase that frequently appeared in screen designer's descriptions of their craft. Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 180–1.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Winter refers to Fanon as 'the first Western theorist of Muslim veils.' Tim Winter, 'The Chador of God on Earth: the Metaphysics of the Muslim Veil,' in *New Blackfriars*, Volume 85, Issue 996 (March 2004), pp. 144–57, p. 144.

<sup>17</sup> Gaines (1990), pp. 184–5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>19</sup> Khanna (1998), pp. 21–2.

<sup>20</sup> Fanon (1965), p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>22</sup> Khanna (1998), p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Stam and Spence (1985), p. 642.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Fanon (1965), p. 51.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 37–8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> Ahmed (1992), p. 149.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 151. Within the establishment, Ahmed refers Lord Cromer, who advocated the *unveiling* of Egyptian women and 'was, in England, founding member and sometime president of the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage.' In the context of Egyptian feminism, however, Ahmed examines Qassim Amin's *Tahreer Al-Mar'a (The Liberation of Woman)* which, hugely controversial when first published in 1899, is credited as originating Arab feminism. Amin advocated the abolition of the *veil*, considering it 'a huge barrier between woman and her elevation, and consequently a huge barrier between the nation and its advance.' Ahmed explains that Amin's debate 'constituted an important moment in the history of Arab women ... The battle inaugurated a new discourse in which the veil came to symbolize a broader signification.' Ahmed likens Amin's thesis to Cromer's position, calling for the 'transformation of Muslim society along the lines of the Western model and for the substitution of the garb of Islamic-style male dominance for that of Western-style male dominance.' Ahmed (1992), p. 153, p. 145, pp. 160–1. For canonical literature on the genesis of Arab or Egyptian feminism, see: Huda Sharawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879–1924)*, trans. Margot Badran (London: Virago, 1986); Qassim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and The New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, trans. Samiha Sidhom



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Peterson (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001); Cynthia Nelson, *Doria Shafik, Egyptian Feminist: A Woman Apart* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996); Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, eds, *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (London: Virago, 1990). The two most noted figures in contemporary Arab feminism are Fatima Mernissi and Nawal El Saadawi. In particular, see: Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Oxford: Kali for Women, 2002); Mernissi (1985); Mernissi (1987); Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (London: Zed, 1980).

<sup>36</sup> Ahmed (1992), p. 151. She here extends this contention to India, the Islamic world and sub-Saharan Africa. A comparable discourse to the *veil* has been offered in India with reference to *sati*. See, for example, Ania Loomba, 'Dead Women Tell No Tales: Issues of Female Subjectivity, Subaltern Agency and Tradition in Colonial and Postcolonial Writings on Widow Immolation in India,' in Lewis and Mills (2003), pp. 241–62.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>38</sup> Fanon (1965), p. 63.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> McClintock (1995), p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 23. Ella Shohat offers an extensive examination of this tradition in the context of Hollywood and Western cinema, highlighting the importance of gendered metaphors in the production of the colonial 'subaltern': 'The metaphoric portrayal of the (non-European) land as a "virgin" coyly awaiting the touch of the colonizer implied that whole continents – Africa, America, Asia, and Australia could only benefit from the emanation of colonial praxis.' Ella Shohat, 'Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema,' in Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, eds, *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 19–66, p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> Tayyer Ozkan, *Orient Sexpres* (Seattle: Eros Comix, 2002), no pagination. I am grateful to Donald K. Ranvaud for bringing this publication to my attention.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> McClintock (1995), p. 22.

<sup>46</sup> Joan Mellen, *Film Guide to The Battle of Algiers* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 50.

<sup>47</sup> Fanon (1965), p. 59.

<sup>48</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Berber House,' in Mary Douglas, *Collected Works, Volume IV, Rules and Meanings: The Anthropology of Everyday Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 101.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860-1950*, (London, Quartet, 1988), p. 71.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 75–7.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>54</sup> El Guindi (1999), p. 3. Inderpal Grewal employs the idea of the *harim* interchangeably with those of South Asian related terms such as *zenana*, *pardah* and *anathpur*. She delineates that they are specific colonial formations subject to varying colonial rule, yet 'they function as a trope that enables subject formation in many places.' Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), p. 5. See also Mervat Hatem, 'Through Each Other's Eyes,' in Nupur Chodhury and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 35–8; and Leila Ahmed, 'Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem,' in *Feminist Studies*, Volume 8, Number 3 (Fall 1982), pp. 521–34.

<sup>55</sup> Graham-Brown (1988), p. 72.

<sup>56</sup> Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 21.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



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<sup>60</sup> Fanon (1965), p. 36.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 43–4.

<sup>63</sup> Pat McGreal, *Veils* (New York: DC Comics, 1999), p. 2. I am grateful to Donald K. Ranvaud for bringing this publication to my attention.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 41.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>70</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 49.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>73</sup> McGreal (1999), p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Considerable scholarship has situated the position of Western women in the colonial context as varying significantly to their male counterparts. Perhaps the most illustrative account of this distinction is provided by Reina Lewis in *Gendering Orientalism*, where she argues that, 'By focusing on women as cultural producers in a field of representation generally seen as male, I shall demonstrate the pervasive effects of imperial ideologies of female subjects and their particular, gendered interpellation into imperial discourse.' Lewis (1996), p. 15. A common and opposing narrative of Western women's position in this field is offered by Shohat, who states that Western women embody "centre" and "periphery," identity and alterity' and exist 'in a relation of domination toward "non-Western" men and women.' Shohat argues that 'the historical positioning of colonial women who have played, albeit with a difference, an oppressive role toward colonized people ... at times actively perpetuating the legacy of Empire.' Shohat (1997), p. 40.

<sup>75</sup> In 'The Other Question,' Bhabha argues that 'the subject turns around the pivot of the stereotype to return to a point of total identification.' He argues 'that in order to conceive of the colonial subject as the effect of power that is productive – disciplinary and "pleasurable" –one has to see the *surveillance* of colonial power as functioning in relation to the regime of the *scopic drive*.' Bhabha posits *ambivalence* in this process of objectification/identification, which 'illustrates that crucial bind of pleasure and power.' Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 76.

<sup>76</sup> Fanon (1965), pp. 58–9; Zayzafoon (2005), p. 81.

<sup>77</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 119.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>79</sup> Fanon (1965), p. 59. In 'The Newly Veiled Woman: Irigaray, Specularity, and the Islamic Veil,' Anne-Emmanuelle Berger draws upon this observation by Fanon, where she argues 'that this sensation of physical incompleteness is akin to a scene of castration,' contending that it is as though 'a kind of mirror stage had failed to take place, leaving the body un-unified and unrecognizable.' Elsewhere in her essay, Berger describes the way in which *mutabarrijāt* (veiled women) refer to non-veiled women as *mutabarrijāt*, an expression she views as designated to Westernized women within popular discourse. She adds, however, that literally *mutabarrijah* denotes 'a fragmented woman,' remarking that it is 'as if only the veil could give unity to an otherwise fragmented female body.' She continues that *mutabarrijah* also translates into 'made-up' or adorned woman, contending, that 'the opposite of the veiled woman is not so much the naked woman as the adorned woman.' This analysis can be read alongside Pontecorvo's representation of the *unveiling* scene, particularly in the way that the process through which the Algerian women disguise themselves as French confirms Berger's interpretation of the *mutabarrijah*: the women who attempt to look 'Western' 'adorn' themselves as they appear 'fragmented' by the mirror after *unveiling*. References to lipstick, mirrors and hair, reinforced by their repetition within frame, can be seen in light of Berger as a product of *unveiling*. Berger (1998), p. 112, p. 107.

<sup>80</sup> Khanna (1998), p. 22.

<sup>81</sup> Stam and Spence (1985), p. 643.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



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<sup>85</sup> Bhabha (2002), p. 70.

<sup>86</sup> Khanna (1998), p. 22. For an extensive reading of *veiling* and *unveiling* in relation to the concept of the uncanny, see Jane Marie Todd, 'The Veiled Woman in Freud's "Das Unheimliche,"' in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Volume 11, Number 3 (1986), pp. 519–28.

<sup>87</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 49.

<sup>88</sup> Alloula's chapter entitled 'Oriental Sapphism' explains how the '*seraglio*' appears 'as the ideal locus of the phantasm in all its contagious splendour.' He continues, 'Sapphism would thus contribute to further eroticize the idea of the harem [*sic*], at least as it is constituted in Western belief.' Alloula (1986), pp. 95–6.

<sup>89</sup> Ella Shohat similarly neglects this issue. She first acknowledges the *unveiling* paradigm when she argues that, 'The Orient as a metaphor for sexuality is encapsulated by the recurrent figure of the veiled woman. The inaccessibility of the veiled woman, mirroring the mystery of the Orient itself, requires a process of Western unveiling for comprehension.' However, in her discussion of *The Battle of Algiers* she fails to recognize the *unveiling* paradigm in the mirror scene and instead interprets their transformation as follows: 'Algerian women wear Western "modern" dress, dye their hair blond, and even act coquettishly with French soldiers. Here it is the Third World that masquerades as the West, not as an act of self-effacing mimicry but as a way of sabotaging the colonial regime of assimilation.' Shohat (1997), p. 32, pp. 52–3.

<sup>90</sup> Stam and Spence in ed. Nichols (1985), p. 643.

<sup>91</sup> Alloula (1986), p. 5.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> For feminist criticism of *The Colonial Harem*, see: Winifred Woodhull, 'Unveiling Algeria,' in Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, eds., *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. 567–85; Mieke Bal, 'The Politics of Citation,' in *Diacritics*, Volume 21, Number 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 24–45.

<sup>94</sup> Woodhull (2003), p. 580.

<sup>95</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p. 98. See Woodhull (2003), p. 578.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 577.

<sup>97</sup> Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press 1993), p. 41.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> See *Veil* (inIVA, 2003), p. 87.

<sup>100</sup> Chow (1993), p. 41.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 52–4.

<sup>103</sup> Khanna (1998), p. 13.

<sup>104</sup> Stam and Spence (1985), p. 633.

<sup>105</sup> Samina Zahir notes in her review of the *Veil* exhibition that 'women attending the forum questioned the curator's sensitivities and motives in exhibiting such portraits when the desire of the subjects not to remove their veil, or to be photographed, was so clearly documented by Garanger.' Samina Zahir, 'Exhibition Review: 'Veil': Curators, Artists and 9/11,' in *Fashion Theory*, Volume 7, Issue 3/4 (2003), pp. 319–26, p. 325.

<sup>106</sup> David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros in *Veil* (inIVA, 2003), p. 35.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Al-Ani, *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., pp. 100–3. For a discussion on the *veil* in relation to the Deleuzian 'fold' in the work of Clérambault, see Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 42.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>113</sup> Al-Ani (2003), p. 90.

<sup>114</sup> Namely, '(a) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; (b) as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; (c) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; (d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences ...



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(e) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.' Nira Yuval-Davis and Flavia Anthias, eds, *Woman-Nation-State* (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), p. 6.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10.

<sup>116</sup> The *Muslim female subject* as metonym for Islam is continually referenced in contemporary media representations, see Appendix B.

<sup>117</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender ad Nation* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 61.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Fanon (1965), p. 67. For *veiling* as a resistance movement in Egypt, see El Guindi's 'Veiling Resistance,' in *Fashion Theory*, Volume 3, Issue 1 (1999), pp. 51-80.

<sup>122</sup> Ahmed (1992), p. 164.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. In *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Partha Chatterjee presents nationalist discourse in the postcolonial world as deriving from the colonialist project. Writing about the historical context of nineteenth century Bengal, he writes that, 'The role of women in nationalist discourse was thus formed through being situated in an 'inner domain of national culture ... constituted in the light of the discovery of "tradition."' Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 117. I shall return to this point in Chapter Four in my discussion on the productions of Islamic national discourse in the Arab Gulf States.

<sup>124</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 123.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>126</sup> Mellen, (1973), p. 50.

<sup>127</sup> Fanon (1965), p. 63.

<sup>128</sup> Yeğenoğlu, pp. 64-6.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>130</sup> McClintock (1995), p. 364.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 366.

<sup>133</sup> Khanna (1998), p. 20.

<sup>134</sup> Fanon (1965), p. 36.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> McClintock (1995), p. 364.

<sup>137</sup> Zayzafoon (2005), p. 69. Fanon's writing on Algerian nationalism has been widely attacked in recent years. Madhu Dubey notes that 'these critiques boil down to the argument that Fanon, like most masculine theorists of decolonizing nationalism, casts "woman" as a symbolic and epistemological ground rather than a historical subject of the Algerian nation.' Counter to feminist criticism of Fanon, Dubey explains that 'despite its limitations Fanon's discussion of nationalism in *The Wretched of the Earth* and *A Dying Colonialism* does not necessarily preclude a feminist politics.' She argues that his account of de-colonial nationalism transcends the limitations found in decolonizing nationalist discourses 'because of his rigorous refusal to resolve [the] contradiction' between tradition and modernity. Madhu Dubey, 'The "True Lie" of the Nation: Fanon and Feminism,' in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Volume 10, Number 2 (1998), pp. 1-29, p. 1-3. Nevertheless, in spite of these criticisms, Woodhull states that, when first published in 1959, Fanon's 'Algeria Unveiled' 'was of undeniable strategic importance to assert a "historic dynamism of the veil" unfolding within a cultural territory free from Algerian women as living symbols of both the colony's resistance and its vulnerability to resistance.' Woodhull (2003), p. 574.

<sup>138</sup> Fanon (1965), p. 42.



## 2 She Is What She Wears: Costume Superfluity, Femininity and the Articulation of Gender

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‘I never did think that gender was like clothes, or that clothes make the woman.’<sup>1</sup>

Judith Butler

In a domestic scene in Marziyeh Meshkini's *The Day I Became a Woman* (2000), *veiling* is first discussed within the female space of the home as we witness the interaction between three generations of women. In this scene the *veil* remains a central subject that is both introduced and reinforced by the matrilineal structure. Firstly, we see the mother showing the grandmother the new *chador* she has bought for her daughter. Later in the scene the mother measures the daughter for her new *chador* as the grandmother interjects to say that she herself should do it, claiming it will get ruined. A shot in this sequence presents both the mother and the grandmother admiring the *chador* for the second time and then cutting it to size. The scene continues with the mother placing the *chador* against her daughter to check her measurements whilst the daughter resists it being placed on her head. The mother then begins to stitch the *chador* and the grandmother, upon agreeing that the daughter can play with her male friend one last time, places a headscarf on her head before she leaves.

This incident establishes a relationship between the subject of the *veil* and the varying attitudes amongst the three generations of women, further exemplified by the daughter's reluctance to let her mother place the *chador* on her head. The daughter's new *chador* is centralized in this particular scene by the manner in which



it is continuously referred to both visually and in the dialogue. This centrality is extended when the grandmother and mother ignore the daughter when she asks if she can play with her friend because they are admiring the *chador*. These references draw special attention to the *chador* as an expression of the daughter's femininity and arrival at womanhood. The scene in fact recalls Simone de Beauvoir's pronouncement on the Western myth of femininity that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,' and that 'Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an *Other*.'<sup>2</sup> The events in the courtyard reveal how the older generations intervene in establishing the arrival of the daughter's womanhood, for which the stitching together, cutting up and measuring of her *chador* stands as a metaphor. Further, throughout the scene the daughter's relationship with her mother and grandmother and the way in which modesty and femininity are embodied in the *chador* illustrate de Beauvoir's comments regarding childhood, particularly that, 'the influence of others upon the child is a factor almost from the start, and thus she is indoctrinated with her vocation from her earliest years.'<sup>3</sup>

This chapter examines how representations of the *Muslim female subject* render the *veil* the foremost site of signification in the articulation of gender and femininity with reference to Islam. In exploring this contention, my argument identifies a number of prevalent paradigms from varying visual sources and texts. I begin with metaphoric and spatial manifestations of the *veil* and argue that such representations present a paradigmatic case whereby the *veil* is rendered a primary site of signification. I engage with the notion of gendered space within the *mise-en-scène*, and extend this observation with reference to the interior/exterior opposition



identified in my previous chapter. Whilst in Chapter One I studied Pontecorvo's aesthetic discourse of gendering the *mise-en-scène* within the pornotropic tradition of female interior space and penetrative metaphors, in this instance my analysis situates this aesthetic with reference to the translation of the ideological dimensions of the *veil* on screen.

I argue that metaphoric and spatial renditions of the *veil* present a recurrent predicament when considering the *Muslim female subject*. I first contend that they operate within a system of representation informed by Orientalist rhetoric and ideology which upholds a grammar of dualisms that continues to attribute the *Muslim female subject* with interiority. I further argue that certain ideological dimensions of the *veil* as metaphor have the pernicious effect of precluding a materialist conception of the *Muslim female body*. With the body extrapolated through metaphor, I contend, after Yeğenoğlu, that interpretations of the *Muslim female subject* ought to be understood in relation to *assujettissement*, such that the *Muslim female body* is acknowledged as a discursive site. With specific reference to these latter observations, I turn to Yeğenoğlu's rendition of the *veil* as *différance* and conclude that this presents a site that finally enables the long-established association of the *Muslim female subject* with interiority to be transcended.

I continue to examine the way in which the *veil* is rendered a primary site of signification with reference to what I refer to as the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers. I identify a recurrent representation of the *Muslim female subject* whereby the *veil* is juxtaposed with an opposing or seemingly opposing signifier. I



demonstrate how opposing notions of femininity are similarly articulated through an opposition of *veiled/unveiled*. I contend that the way the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers locates the *veil* and the *Muslim female subject* as sites of devalued difference upholds an epistemological distinction between East and West and thus constitutes a by-product of Orientalist discourse. Following this, I extend consideration of the paradigm of *unveiling*, established in Chapter One, to its rhetorical employment in the articulation of gender. I then situate these observations within my overarching argument to demonstrate how the rhetorical employment of the paradigm of *unveiling* and the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers render the *veil* the primary site of signification.

Finally, having extended Gaines' argument on dress and the woman's story to a colonial cinematic context in Chapter One, this chapter continues to examine the relationship between dress and cinematic narrative. I explore how the *veil* can be understood in terms of what Gaines calls 'costume superfluity,' and consider how this concept relates to the cinematic narratives in Makhmalbaf Film House productions *The Day I Became a Woman* (2000) by Marziyeh Meshkini and *At Five in the Afternoon* (2003) by Samira Makhmalbaf. To support my argument I make detailed references to two other productions from the Makhmalbaf Film House, namely Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Kandahar* (2000) and Samira Makhmalbaf's *The Apple* (1997). In these films, I refer to selected scenes to explore the way in which metaphoric renditions of the *veil* are translated within the *mise-en-scène*. Further, this chapter includes material from various visual sources, such as the artwork of two Iranian artists: *Untitled* (1998) by Shadi Ghadirian, and *Me* (1996) by Ghazel.



These references are made to support my argument concerning the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers. In examining the rhetorical rendition of the paradigm of *unveiling*, this chapter also gives attention to its deployment in book covers and posters.

I conclude once again in light of the relationship between dress and cinematic narrative by examining the extent to which the *veil* “tells” the woman’s story.’ Indeed, this particular analysis has been largely responsible for engendering the conception of the *Muslim female subject* that is central to the overarching argument of this study. My examination of visual references and cinematic narratives has revealed that certain paradigmatic representations subordinate both the *Muslim female subject* and the *Muslim female body* to the *veil*. This being the case, I advocate that the *Muslim female subject* be considered as independent and autonomous to dress.

### **Gendered Space and the *Mise-en-Scène***

Set in Kish Island in the Persian/Arabian Gulf, *The Day I Became a Woman* presents, in three related stories, the issues facing women in contemporary Iran from childhood to old age. My analysis focuses predominantly on the first story, entitled ‘Hava,’ privileged by the title of the film, which reveals how a young girl, Hava, in keeping with tradition, symbolically becomes a woman on her ninth birthday. Her mother buys her a *chador* as a birthday gift and there follows the scene described earlier in which her mother and grandmother measure her and adjust it to fit. Now



this day has come, Hava's grandmother does not allow her to play with her male friend Hassan, though her mother does not mind their friendship. In an act of cunning, Hava explains to her grandmother that since she was born at noon she will not become a woman until that time and promises, if allowed to play with Hassan, to be back by that time. Her grandmother teaches her how to tell the time using a stick placed in the ground and warns her that when the stick no longer casts a shadow, it will be time for her to return home. This first narrative section of the film then shows Hava's final hours of childhood and her eventual assumption of womanhood as her mother dresses her in the *chador*.

The name Hava has its origins in two traditional references. It is the Persian name for Eve as well as the name of a slave who was given to the *Shi'i* Imam Hussein, who became fixated with her beauty and freed her.<sup>4</sup> The cultural specificity inscribed in this particular name introduces the themes of imprisonment and freedom through its allusion to Hussein's slave, and the themes of sin, transgression and punishment through its allusion to the story of Eve. Hava's story of becoming a woman is thus told within this specific context.<sup>5</sup>

The opening sequence of the film introduces the viewer to the subject of the feminine and begins with an image of a black headscarf used as a sail (TDW.1) (refer to Figure 3.1). The subsequent shots continually allude to the feminine subject, particularly through references to the domestic, where the viewer is presented with an image of the mother against a laundry line (TDW.2) and Hassan's entry into the home (TDW.3). References to the feminine continue as the mother



enters a white tent to wake Hava up for school (TDW.4). The scene continues as the grandmother asks Hassan to leave the house. (TDW.5). The extra-diegetic sound of the mother telling her daughter it is her birthday accompanies a shot of Hava appearing from inside the white tent (TDW.6), followed by a shot of the mother leaving the house (TDW.7).



Figure 3.1: 'Hava' - *The Day I Became a Woman* (2000)

This sequence introduces the viewer to a specific notion of femininity that is developed throughout the film. The beginning of the sequence particularly draws the viewer to the notion of gendered segregation and the way in which it relates to Hava's arrival at womanhood. For example, the manner in which Hassan kicks the door open manifests his intrusion into the domestic space (TDW.3). That Hava is the object of this aggressive entry is made clear by the way her name is mentioned by Hassan after he kicks the door open and by the grandmother, who explains that Hava is now a woman as she pushes Hassan out of the house. The scenes described thus not only introduce the viewer to the concept of gendered segregation but also, through the inscription of Hava's name, foretell Hava and Hassan's separation which occurs later in the narrative.



The opening sequence of the film also reveals to the viewer a divergence of attitude towards certain social traditions between the three women. Of the three generations, it is clear that the grandmother holds the most traditional values, exemplified as she reveals her sentiments regarding Hassan's relationship with Hava. Hava's mother, on the other hand, displays a more relaxed stance on the children's friendship since she allows her daughter to play with Hassan and walks into the house with him at the beginning of the film.

The most significant difference between Hava's mother and her grandmother is exemplified in their attitude towards the *veil*. Whilst it is Hava's mother who leaves the house to buy her daughter's first *chador*, it is in fact her grandmother who verbally expresses the view that Hava's hair should be covered. Further, in the narrative, though it has been agreed that Hava has yet another hour before turning into a woman, her grandmother nevertheless places a headscarf on her head before she leaves the house. The following scene reveals another instance indicating the grandmother's traditional ways. Hava is shown using a clock to discover that she has an hour left before turning into a woman; her grandmother, however, insists on teaching her how to read the time by the shadow cast by a stick.

The generational disparities that underscore the first section of *The Day I Became a Woman* are also expressed in terms of dress. The beginning of the film reveals the mother against a laundry line wearing an indoor *veil*, as exemplified in shot TDW.2, and wearing a *chador* and a *burqu'* as she leaves the house in shot TDW.7. The grandmother is also seen here wearing a *chador* and a *burqu'* (TDW.5). In a scene



that follows, however, the mother enters the courtyard wearing her *chador* and *burqu'* (TDW.8) and then changes into her indoor *veil* as she sits by the grandmother (TDW. 9) (refer to Figure 3.2). The grandmother continues to wear her *chador* and *burqu'*, whilst Hava is seen wearing a dress (TDW.10). In the scenes described above, the women's differing attitudes to Hava's arrival at womanhood are reflected in the varying forms of modesty expressed in their attire. The grandmother's traditional viewpoint is reflected in her dress, for she wears both the *burqu'* and the *chador* consistently throughout the film. The mother's attitude towards Hava is not as stringent as the grandmother's, on the other hand, and she changes her attire according to whether she occupies domestic or public locales.



Figure 3.2: 'Hava' - *The Day I Became a Woman* (2000)

The significance of dress in the opening sequence is further highlighted in the way in which Hava's relation to the *veil* is encapsulated in shot TDW.6, where she holds the white fabric of the tent against her head as though it were a *veil*, giving the appearance that she is wearing a white *veil*. Her appearance from inside the tent, alongside the extra-diegetic sound of the mother telling her daughter that it is her birthday, renders this visual reference evocative of an emergence from a womb. The figurative connotations of birth and womanhood alongside the image of Hava with a white '*veil*' highlights the theme of subjectivity in the title, *The Day I Became a Woman*, emphasizing the inevitability of her becoming a woman and establishing the



relationship between woman and the *veil* witnessed throughout the film. The womanhood that Hava is about to assume entails both her wearing the *veil* and her segregation from Hassan. Following this, how then do the themes alluded to and foretold in the opening sequence relate to the narrative structure of the film?

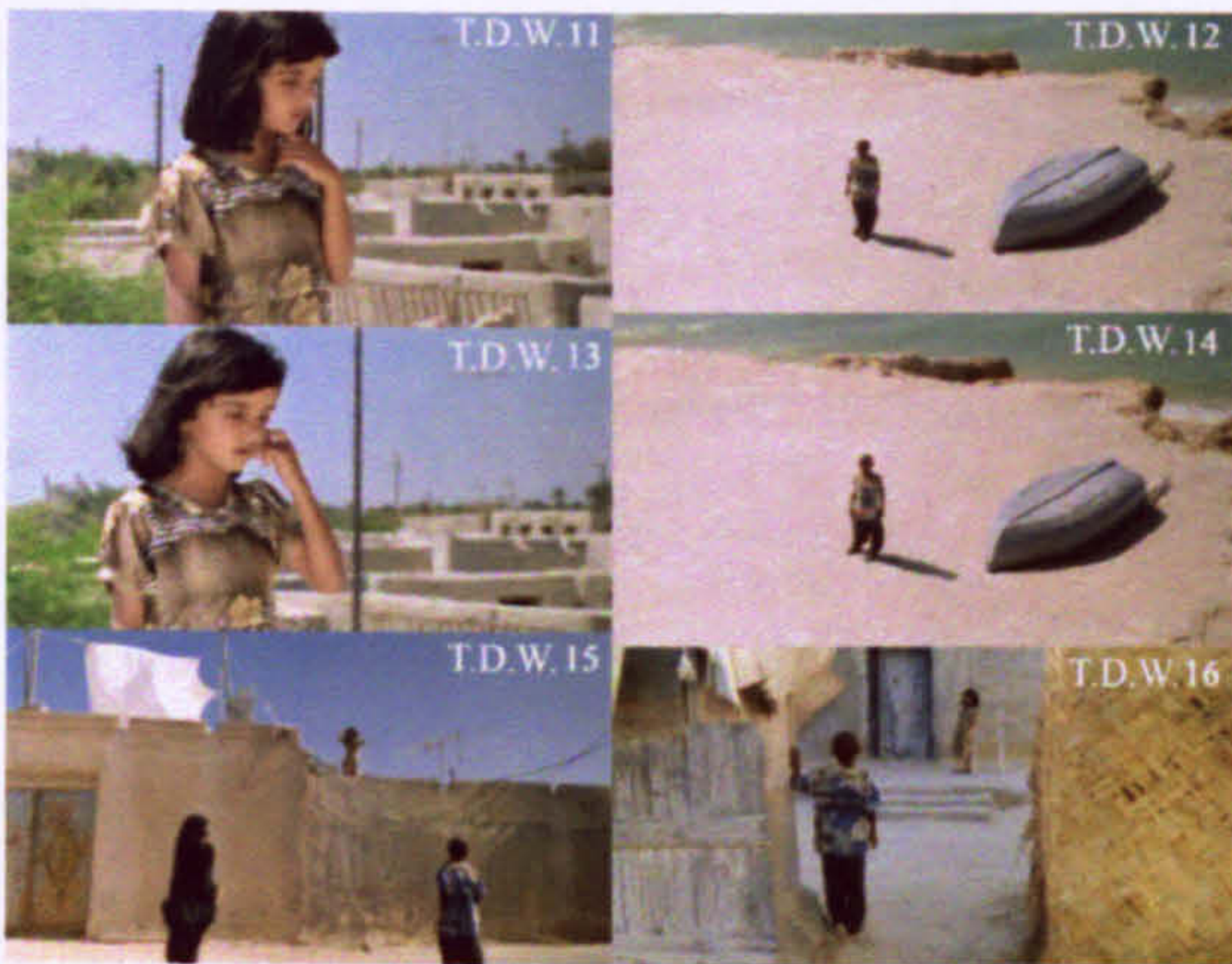


Figure 3.3: 'Hava' - *The Day I Became a Woman* (2000)

In the scene described earlier, Hava and Hassan's separation is first illustrated stylistically by the fact that they appear in separate shots (refer to Figure 3.3) Their dialogue takes place in a shot-reverse-shot sequence in which Hava stands on the roof and Hassan by the sea, a technique that enables a dialogue between the characters whilst maintaining their visual separation. This is further heightened through the spatial composition within the *mise-en-scène*. For example, the first four shots within the sequence reveal Hava in medium close-up looking down (TDW.11-3), whilst Hassan, having to look up to respond to her, appears distant within the frame (TDW.12-4). The consecutive visual contrast in their differing representations within the frame, namely in the manner in which one character appears close whilst the other remains distant, creates a varying spatial composition for the viewer. This



is then reinforced by their opposing spatial positions in relation to each other, with Hava adopting a higher position on the roof than Hassan, standing by the sea.

In this shot-reverse-shot, Hava's voice is heard much more clearly since she is presented within the foreground of the frame; Hassan, remaining in the distance, sounds more distant and his voice is interrupted by the noise of the waves. As far as the narrative is concerned, the separation prescribed by the grandmother has only been expressed towards Hassan, specifically in the shot that reveals her pushing him out of the house. That Hava embodies the forbidden subject for Hassan is thus manifested in the manner of their spatial composition, primarily in the way in which she is elevated in relation to him. Further, the way in which Hassan struggles to be heard by Hava as he looks up, while she in contrast speaks effortlessly, represents the proscription imposed on *him* in relation to *her* at this particular stage of the narrative's development.

Shot TDW.15 reveals Hava on the roof and Hassan and her mother, who enters the left hand side of the frame after the children's exchange, on the ground looking up at her. (refer to Figure 3.3) Whilst Hava's continued elevation in this scene signifies that she remains the subject of the narrative, interestingly the spatial division between Hava and Hassan is maintained through their varying heights, even when they both appear within the same shot. In the following shot, the spatial composition of the frame reveals Hava in the background on the right hand side and Hassan in the foreground on the left (TDW.16). Here, the spatial separation between the two characters is manifested in the interior space created through their positions on either



side of the courtyard and either side of the frame. Hassan stands by the second door and does not enter the courtyard, which is demarcated as a female space since it is here adopted by Hava and in the following shots by the grandmother and the mother. In this shot, the female space within the home divides the characters spatially within the frame. Employing the female space as a means of separation further illustrates how the feminine relates to the masculine within this gendered configuration.

How, then, does the spatial composition in shot TDW.16 relate to the narrative structure, and who embodies the forbidden in this shot? The grandmother's prescribed segregation of Hava from Hassan is witnessed in a shot preceding TDW.16, where she interrupts their dialogue by telling Hava that she can no longer play with boys since she is now a woman. Thus in shot TDW.16 Hassan embodies the forbidden in relation to Hava, in the same way that she embodied the forbidden in relation to him earlier in the narrative. This is then illustrated in the spatial composition within the shot, where the characters are equally aligned within the frame, with Hassan in the foreground on the right hand side of the screen and Hava on the left and in the background. This counters the way they were represented earlier, appearing in separate shots and adopting varying positions within the frame with Hava in medium close-up and elevated on the roof (TDW.11-3) and Hassan in the distance (TDW.12-4) looking up at her (TDW.15). Their opposed representations, witnessed in their equal alignment in shot TDW.16, are further reinforced by the way in which Hassan leans against the door and Hava leans against the staircase. Both characters here embody the forbidden in relation to each other



and this reciprocity is visually expressed in their balanced positioning within the frame. The technique of implying separation through the spatial composition whenever Hava and Hassan interact thus further foregrounds the separation imposed by the grandmother as the narrative develops.

Later, the narrative contains a scene where Hava exchanges her black headscarf for a toy fish (refer to Figure 3.4). Before this incident her grandmother is seen placing the headscarf on her head after conceding to her last meeting with Hassan. The reference to the black headscarf does not directly signify her womanhood, but it nevertheless implies it since it indicates the transformatory process of becoming a woman during this particular hour. There is therefore an element of transgression in Hava's succumbing to the temptation to exchange the headscarf for the toy and an implicit reference to the connections of Hava's name with Eve.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 3.4: 'Hava' - *The Day I Became a Woman* (2000)

Hava plays with the boys as they build a boat out of oil drums (refer to Figure 3.4). One of the boys is then seen within the same shot as Hava, entering from the right hand side of the frame (TDW.17). The end of the shot and the subsequent one within this series reveal them leaving and then entering the frame holding hands (TDW.18-19). With the viewer now aware that the boys are associated with the forbidden as far as Hava is concerned, the picture of them holding hands can be read as a further



form of transgression and another allusion to the story of Eve. Moreover, in shots TDW.18 and TDW.19, the viewer is not only presented with the image of Hava's interaction with the boy and her relinquishment of the headscarf, but simultaneously with the first instance in the film where Hava adopts a close spatial position within the frame to a masculine subject.

Appearing in a scene where the symbol of their segregation is exchanged, what are we to make of the characters' proximity within the frame? With the exchange of the headscarf, the *mise-en-scène* foregrounds the absence of spatial separation between the sexes, always inscribed within the composition of the shots up to this point. Hava's transgression is therefore stylistically manifested in her close proximity to the forbidden. Thus the *mise-en-scène* here directly opposes the former representations of Hava's interaction with Hassan since the exchange of the headscarf signals a physical proximity and an illegitimate interaction between the feminine and the masculine within the frame.

While all cinematic *mise-en-scènes* mobilize figures in space, I am suggesting that cinemas concerned with the institutionalization of Islamic female modesty are engaged in complex cultural and aesthetic negotiations of gendered space. These negotiations can be manifested through proximity between characters within and between frames, as in the sequence discussed here. To give another example to clarify my argument, there is an iconic scene in Abbas Kiarostami's *Through the Olive Trees* (1994) in which the protagonists Hossein and Tahereh are actors on the set of a film in which they play husband and wife. In 'real life' the narrative reveals



Hossein's relentless pursuit of Tahereh, whose family he believes would disapprove of him because he is illiterate and has no house. A shot reveals a moment in a long take just prior to the film shoot when Hossein asks, 'Is your heart with me? Tell me.' In this scene, the dynamic between the characters captured through Tahereh's averted look and lack of answer to Hossein is indicative of their relationship throughout the narrative. It is left open for the audience to interpret whether Tahereh's response expresses unrequited love or merely reflects social decorum.

In her essay 'Abbas Kiarostami: Cinema of Uncertainty, Cinema of Delay,' Laura Mulvey refers to Tahereh's averted gaze as an 'unseen look' and interprets this moment and the story of Tahereh and Hossein as symbolic of 'the reality of women's position in the Islamic Republic and its cinema.'<sup>7</sup> She regards Tahereh as emblematic of Iran's female collective, and believes 'her silence comes to represent the silence of women.'<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that *Through the Olive Trees* is set in the village of Koker in northern Iran, where specific social customs regarding gender interaction may vary extensively from those in the city. Mulvey's rendition of Tahereh's 'unseen look' as standing as the embodiment of 'the reality of women's position' and the institutionalization of Islamic female modesty proves disconcertingly problematic for the way in which it forecloses interpretation of this particular response. In rendering the female protagonist and her story with Hossein as an allegory of the condition of women in Iran, she disregards Tahereh's unrequited love for Hossein, which possibly constitutes the characters' private experience. She therefore not only negates the subtlety of Tahereh's averted look,



which the film leaves open for its audience to interpret, but demonstrates a universalizing tendency which neglects to take into account the specificity of 'Third World cultures.'<sup>9</sup>



Figure 3.5: *Through the Olive Trees* (1994)

In fact, it is not exclusively Tahereh's 'unseen look' but rather the aesthetics of the *mise-en-scène* that conveys the dynamic between the characters (Figure 3.5). Tahereh is seated on the right hand side of the frame looking down and Hossein stands on the left, also with his head averted. They are divided spatially by the blue pillars, which frame them individually. The particular poignancy of this shot lies in the fact that it is inflected with irony, with Hossein attempting to take advantage of their physical proximity within the narrative whilst the *mise-en-scène* continues to divide them spatially. In *Through the Olive Trees* the notion of gendered segregation is thus implied but not referred to directly as it is in *The Day I Became a Woman*.

### **Maintaining Interiority: Spatial and Metaphoric Renditions of the *Veil***

Sarah Graham-Brown explains that early Western photographic images of women enforced a clear distinction between the 'public' and 'private' spheres of their lives.<sup>10</sup> Such a dichotomy is indubitably simplistic because it ignores the social and



economic specificities of women's personal circumstances, such as age, class or their relation to family and community.<sup>11</sup> Seclusion and sexual segregation, she contends, become more a matter of control, where women's movements and visibility are subject to restrictions, 'whether ... at home, at work in the fields or walking in the street.'<sup>12</sup> El Guindi, adopting an etymological approach by studying the linguistic roots of the Arabic language, contributes to the anthropological debate on the private/public dichotomy by arguing that the notion of private space should rather be read in terms of the 'sacred.'<sup>13</sup> Critical of a rigid private/public distinction, she attempts to provide a conceptual replacement for the term 'privacy' which, she argues, has no counterpart in the Arabic language:

Arab privacy does not connote the 'personal,' the 'secret' or the 'individuated space.' It concerns two core spheres – women and the family. For both, privacy is sacred and carefully guarded. For women it is both a right and an exclusive privilege, and is reflected in dress, space, architecture and proxemic behavior.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, she argues that the notion of privacy is active and that 'Public display does not violate privacy, since privacy is not about seclusion, exclusion or invisibility.'<sup>15</sup> In her analysis, she highlights the term *satr*, which she contends refers to 'the veil, curtains and sanctity,' and whose cognate verb means 'to shield, to guard, to cover, to protect, to veil.'<sup>16</sup> Its noun, *sitarah*, which she states signifies 'veil, curtain, and screen,' is like the term *hijāb* in that it is mentioned in Islamic text, spoken dialect and 'relates to core concepts and to dress.'<sup>17</sup> El Guindi then correlates *veiling* with the *mashrabiyyah* (lattice wood screens), which she explains, 'serve to guard families' and women's right to privacy – that is the right "to see" but



not “be seen” – and are not about seclusion or invisibility (Figure 3.6).<sup>18</sup> She adds, ‘Dress in general, but particularly veiling, is privacy’s visual metaphor.’<sup>19</sup>

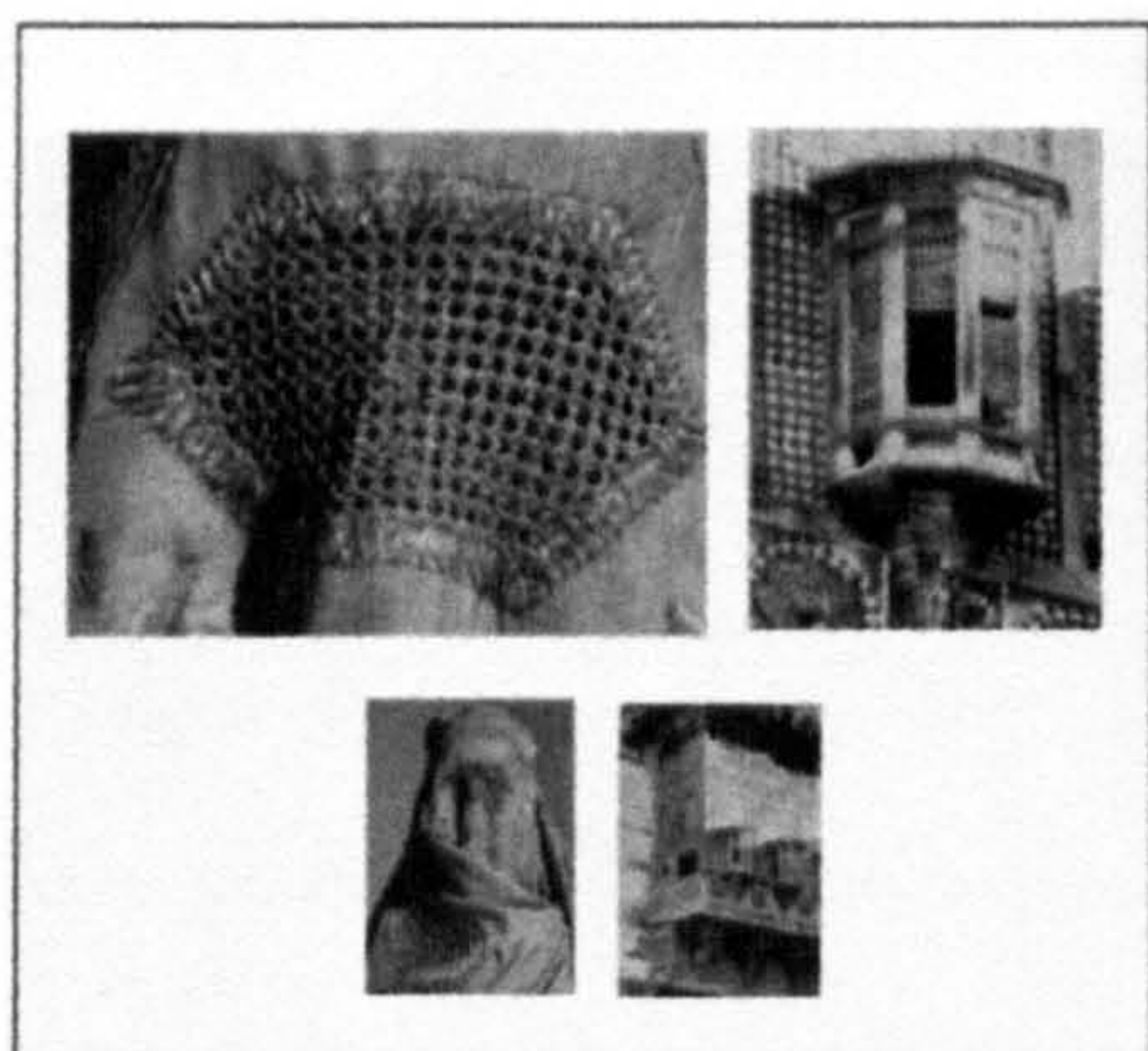


Figure 3.6: *Veil-Mashrabiyyah Analogy* (1998)

Whilst El Guindi’s argument attempts to re-inscribe the private/public dichotomy, and her conceptual rendition of privacy may very well apply to the home, architecture and the family, her etymological references to *satr* also include ‘curtain,’ meaning both the verb ‘to cover’ and the noun ‘screen,’ which hardly conform to her contention that *veiling* does not refer to ‘seclusion and invisibility.’ Whilst the analogy between *veiling* and the *mashrabiyyah* – ‘the right to “see” but not be “seen”’ – may be valid, her etymological approach fails to acknowledge how references such as ‘curtain’ and ‘to cover’ may very well be interpreted to imply an interior/exterior dichotomy.

Fatima Mernissi proffers an opposing argument, contending that ‘Muslim sexuality is territorial’ and that ‘regulatory mechanisms consist primarily in a strict allocation of space to each sex.’<sup>20</sup> This division, she explains, relies on spatial boundaries that separate Muslim society into gendered categories, ‘the universe of men (the *ummah* [*sic*], the world religion and power) and the universe of women, the domestic world



of sexuality and the family.’<sup>21</sup> In this structure, interaction between the sexes ‘violate the spatial rules that are the pillars of the Muslim sexual order.’<sup>22</sup> Seclusion, which she aligns with *veiling*, thus serves to maintain the order of the *ummah* and prevents *fitnah* (transgression) and disorder (by illicit sexual relations), which is initiated by the visibility of woman.<sup>23</sup>

In light of my analysis, these arguments provide an interesting conceptual framework within which to explore the way in which the notion of gendered segregation through *veiling* is ideologically and metaphorically employed within the filmic *mise-en-scène*. The scenes between Hava and Hassan in *The Day I Became a Woman* maintain a consistent distinction between the sexes through the technique of spatial separation. The scene between Hava and the boy by the sea, on the other hand, presents the contrary effect, with the thematic reference to transgression inherent in her relinquishing the headscarf translated stylistically through the characters’ close proximity in contravention of spatial rules.

As established in Chapter One, given the Orientalist tradition of aligning the *veil* with the *harīm* as symbols of seclusion, it is unsurprising that an aesthetic of interiority is generated through a metaphoric rendition of the *veil* when the *Muslim female subject* and the society in which she is subjugated are being described. In the second story of *The Day I Became a Woman*, for example, the protagonist Ahoo is prevented from racing a bicycle with other women by her male relatives. In this narrative, binary oppositions are present throughout the *mise-en-scène*. The first such is the contrast of the women’s covered bodies with the men’s bare chests.



Another is evident in the fact that the men occupy the exterior space (the surrounding desert landscape) and the women occupy the interior (the track) (Figure 3.7). Moreover, the tension between tradition and modernity is manifested stylistically in the juxtaposition of the men's horses and the women's bicycles. The *mise-en-scène* thus reveals a metaphoric rendition of the restrictions that are imposed on women by patriarchal society – Kish Island is the only place where women are permitted to cycle in Iran.<sup>24</sup> Segregation, the forbidden and the delineation of private and public are thus expressed through an aesthetic of binary opposites, with the interior/exterior dichotomy made central in articulating the position of women in Islamic patriarchy.



Figure 3.7: 'Ahoo' - *The Day I Became a Woman* (2000)

In the final scene of the first story of *The Day I Became a Woman*, in which Hava goes to Hassan's house, the complex negotiation of cross-gender interaction continues. The characters do not adopt the same space but rather are separated both physically, as he is confined indoors, and stylistically, by a shot-reverse-shot technique. Hava appears within the frame and calls through the barred window to Hassan, who emerges and gives her money to buy sweets. The next shot reveals Hava running towards the house with the sweets and calling to Hassan again, who is shown in medium close-up holding on to the bars. Their exchange continues in a



shot-reverse-shot sequence as she feeds him through the bars. She then runs into the distance to place her stick in the sand as the camera cuts to another shot of Hassan holding onto the bars of the window. Hava holds the stick then moves towards him. The scene concludes with a shot of the stick in the sand, Hava continuing to feed Hassan hurriedly, aware that she has only a few moments left, as finally her mother approaches to dress her in a *chador*.

This scene invokes the connotative resonances in Hava's name, recalling the story of Hussein's slave through the underlying theme of imprisonment. Significantly, however, Meshkini inverts the allusion by associating Hassan with imprisonment and Hava with freedom.<sup>25</sup> The gender inversion is extended in as far as it subverts the interior/exterior dichotomy, where the interior space is now occupied by the masculine and the exterior by the feminine, for here we witness Hava moving freely, whereas Hassan is confined to the house. Her mobility is illustrated as she leaves to buy sweets and later to check the time, and articulated stylistically within a shot-reverse-shot sequence, where the shot in which she moves into the backdrop of the frame is juxtaposed with the static image of Hassan holding onto the bars. This contrast is then reiterated in other shots that reveal her at a distance moving within a wide landscape towards the camera, where she finally appears in medium close-up. The open expanse of the sea behind her suggests a space into which potentially she could move.



In an interview with the Iranian-based publication *Film International*, Meshkini was asked to comment on her attitude in *The Day I Became a Woman* towards the tradition that the age of nine constitutes a legal or religious marker of womanhood:

I have expressed a subject that I have experienced. I have not criticized it, nor made a judgement about it being good or bad. What has been put forward is only what exists in fact. There is no criticism, I have only shown what is there.<sup>26</sup>

Against Meshkini's account, I would suggest that criticism of this tradition is encoded in the final scene of Hava's story through the subversion of the interior/exterior dichotomy. Through the wearing of the *chador*, Hava is the bearer of their segregation; with Hassan confined in the house, however, this concept is inverted, since he here bears their segregation. Hava's destiny in becoming a woman is thus aligned with an image of confinement, with the symbolic representation of her condition manifested in Hassan's experience of imprisonment throughout the scene.

Whilst Meshkini's critique of female confinement is laudable in its intentions, her employment of the interior/exterior dichotomy in the articulation of *veiling* on screen locates her work within a tradition that continues to dominate visual representations of the *Muslim female subject*; that is to say, it upholds a grammar of dualisms that fails to move beyond representing the *Muslim female subject* in terms of confinement, and ensures that definitive boundaries are always maintained and



cannot be overthrown. Whilst the subversion inherent in confining the male subject seemingly offers a challenge to this tradition, this intention is inevitably subsumed by the fact that such an image, operating within a system of representation predicated on an interior/exterior aesthetic, continues both to acknowledge and sustain the persistent alignment of the *Muslim female subject* with interiority.

Samira Makhmalbaf's *The Apple* (1997), which won her the *Camera d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival at the age of seventeen, tells the true story of two sisters who were locked up in a house for twelve years by their father and who live as prisoners with their blind mother (refer to Figure 3.8). Hamid Naficy refers to one scene in which the *veil* as metaphor generates an interior/exterior dichotomy:

Makhmalbaf turned the veil and the *hejab* [*sic*] (system of modesty) into a panoptic technology by inscribing them at many levels and in many domains: the girls are veiled by their imprisonment in the dark and dank rooms; an iron gate prevents their access to the yard ... the mother, who is similarly imprisoned, is completely covered from head to toe by her chador, with barely a small hole open for her sightless eyes, and the high walls surrounding the house veil it from the outside. However, the outside world intrudes: the neighbours keep an eye on the house, the social-work system intervenes on behalf of the girls and the media sensationalizes their story. *Sib* [*The Apple*] itself contributed both to the inscription of the veil and to its critique.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 3.8: *The Apple* (1997)



Interestingly, the 'panoptic technology' which Naficy ascribes to the *veil* renders the *Muslim female subject* imprisoned, unseeing yet seen – 'the high walls surrounding the house veil it from the outside' but 'the outside world intrudes.' His reading of the *veil* is the antithesis of that articulated by El Guindi who, although she does not refer to the panopticon explicitly, nonetheless employs a panoptically-positioned observer ('the right "to see" but not "be seen"') in her *veil/mashrabiyya* analogy. Crucially, Naficy's point of departure is an association of the *veil* with imprisonment – 'the mother, who is similarly imprisoned, is completely covered' – which is further reinforced in his rhetoric – 'veiled by their imprisonment,' 'high walls ... veil it from the outside' – which fails, however, to disentangle how the *Muslim female subject* arrives at such a point within the regime of visibility in the first place, that is, of being the observed and not the observer.<sup>28</sup> What both Naficy and El Guindi ignore is the way in which the body functions within a dialectic of privileged visibility.

In my Introduction, I referred to Yeğenoğlu who draws on Foucault's notion of *assujettissement* (subjectification) to highlight the importance of a '*bodily materiality*' in understanding the relation between the body and mechanisms of colonial surveillance and domination.<sup>29</sup> Her discussion on the discourse of Enlightenment and 'the scopic regime of modernity' demonstrates the relationship between 'the desire to know, desire to unveil, desire to see' and 'the quest for colonial mastery.'<sup>30</sup> She adds that Foucault's discussion of the panopticon demonstrates that the age of modernity and Enlightenment was one 'marked by a



desire for total control and mastery (of the body) based on the notion of perfect visibility.’<sup>31</sup>

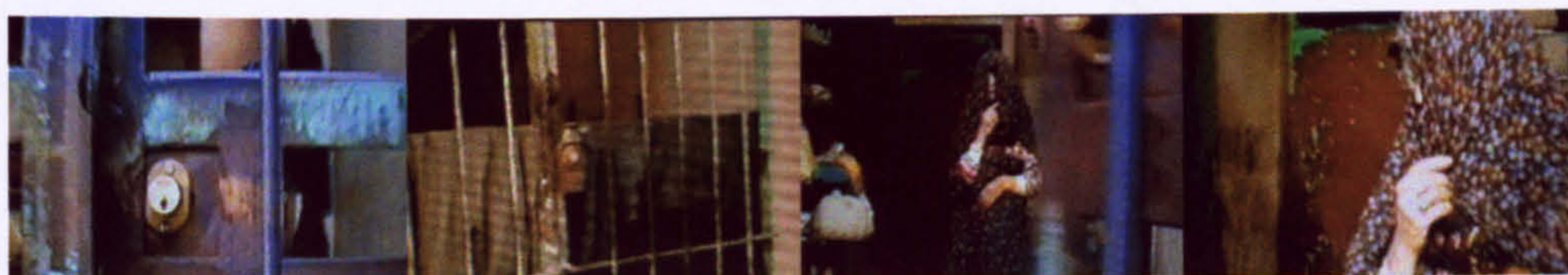


Figure 3.9: *The Apple* (1997)

Crucially, in *The Apple* the diegesis is interrupted with real documentary footage of the welfare workers on their way to the house. The scene reveals an entry into the house, the courtyard, the door and then finally the room, where we see the blind mother (Figure 3.9).<sup>32</sup> According to Naficy’s account of Makhmalbaf’s inscription of the *veil* as a ‘panoptic technology,’ ‘the outside world intrudes’ and Makhmalbaf’s camera penetrates ‘at many levels and in many domains’ finally to make visible the ‘mother completely covered from head to toe by her *chador*, with barely a small hole open for her sightless eyes.’ In rendering the *veil* a metaphor for the panopticon, Naficy’s analysis thus fails to elucidate how the *Muslim female subject* functions within such a technology and, more importantly, how it is then subjugated within a configuration of imprisonment and visibility. Whilst references to those ‘who see’ and ‘cannot see’ are made, Naficy’s panopticon takes no account of a power/knowledge nexus, by which surveillance of the ‘veiled’ (and therefore ‘imprisoned’) subject is articulated in relation to the operations of power within the field of visibility. As Foucault contends, ‘He [*sic*] who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power.’<sup>33</sup> In fact, if the panoptic model is evoked in relation to the scenes here discussed, it could be argued that not only does ‘the outside world’ intrude within the diegesis



but, most significantly in the documentary interjection in the film, so too does the penetrative camera lens, which locates the viewer in a privileged position within the field of visibility. This is further reinforced by the knowledge that the blind woman did not agree to be filmed. In an interview with *The Observer*, Makhmalbaf confesses that, 'She didn't agree. If it was up to her she wouldn't let anyone in the house'; the reason the woman did what was required without knowing the camera was present was because she was provoked into it by the director.<sup>34</sup>

The ideological, spatial and etymological dimensions established by the scholarly debate on the *veil* confirm an interior/exterior dichotomy that excludes the notion of 'bodily materiality' and the mechanisms of subjectification. This effect is further compounded by the prevalent aesthetic of the *veil* as metaphor. A symbolic rendition of the *veil*, therefore, may very well serve to articulate and/or critique *ideological* and *spatial* dimensions of the *veil*. It is rendered problematic, however, if the body is extrapolated through metaphor when the notion of *veiling* is articulated, as is the case with El Guindi, an effect witnessed in her correlation of the *veil* and a window: 'whereas *mashrabiyyah* is stationary, veiling is mobile.'<sup>35</sup>

An aesthetic of interiority engendered through a metaphoric rendition of the *veil*, most clearly witnessed in the field of visual discourse, further endorses what Yeğenoğlu contends:

But what explains the obsession with lifting the veil is something that is always-already inscribed in this unique sartorial matter. The veil is seen as a border which distinguishes inside from outside, as a screen or cover, and



women are associated with the inside, home and territory ... Of course at the same time the veil demarcates a boundary and delimits the colonial power.<sup>36</sup>

Whilst Naficy's reference to the panopticon renders the *Muslim female subject* 'seen,' the argument El Guindi puts forth that she is in fact a panoptically-positioned observer is one that has been taken up extensively by postcolonial discourse. Thus, as cited in Chapter One, Fanon writes, 'This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself.'<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in his analysis of French colonial postcards, Alloula describes the gaze of 'veiled women' as 'like the photographic lens that takes aim at everything.'<sup>38</sup> This 'feminine gaze,' he writes, frustrates the photographer, who turns it 'into the sign of his own negation.'<sup>39</sup> It 'threatens him in his being and *prevents him accomplishing himself as gazing gaze*':

The photographer will respond to this quiet and almost natural challenge by means of a double violation: he will unveil the veiled and give figural representation to the forbidden. This is the summary of his only program or, rather, his symbolic revenge upon a society that continues to deny him any access and questions the legitimacy of his desire. The photographer's studio will become, then, a pacified microcosm where his desire, his scopic instinct, can find satisfaction.<sup>40</sup>

Alloula's description of the French photographer can be likened to a scene in Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Kandahar* (2000), another production from the Makhmalbaf Film house, which employs the interior/exterior dichotomy. In this instance, however, unlike *The Apple*, the dichotomy is not rendered as a spatial metaphor but



rather is applied directly to the body. The scene shows a wedding procession of women in coloured *burqu's* crossing a desert landscape as they make their way to Kandahar. A shot reveals the protagonist wearing a *burqu'* in extreme close-up, with her eyes centralised within the frame as she gazes back at the camera (Figure 3.10). The scene continues and the protagonist now joins the wedding procession where, before the women cross the border, they are each searched. A series of shots reveals the camera positioned from within the women's *burqu'*, where we now see their faces in close-up as in turn they call out their names.

Like Alloula's photographer, Makhmalbaf first captures the 'feminine gaze' in a shot which presents the protagonist in her *burqu'* looking directly into the camera. The following shots, in which the lens is positioned within the *burqu'* to reveal the women's faces, enact the 'double violation' identified by Alloula, where the camera serves to 'unveil the veiled and give figural representation to the forbidden.' The satisfaction of the 'scopic instinct' is then completed in the final sequence of the film, which presents a point-of-view shot of the protagonist from within the *burqu'*, looking out across the desert at a sunset. Makhamalbaf thus endows the viewer with the opportunity finally to accomplish '*himself as gazing gaze.*'

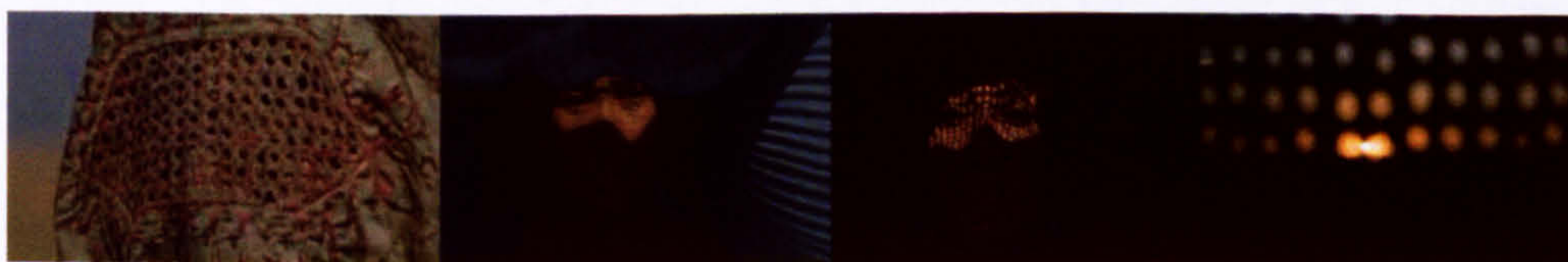


Figure 3.10: *Kandahar* (2000)

His employment of the interior/exterior dichotomy herein endorses the scopic drive that seeks to penetrate the *veil*, which this aesthetic inscribes as a barrier. It could be



suggested therefore that, when representing the *Muslim female subject*, her alignment with interiority is invariably informed by the *veil*'s colonial narrative and the ideological connotations established therein which position her as site to be penetrated. This being the case, Yeğenoğlu proffers a reading of the *veil* that attempts to move beyond this rigid categorical composition. As established in my introduction, in arguing that the *veil* differs from a simple cover where the interior/exterior dichotomy is problematic, Yeğenoğlu writes,

In the ambiguous position it occupies, the veil is not outside the woman's body. Nor is she the interior that needs to be protected or penetrated. *Her body is not simply the inside of the veil: it is of it; 'she' is constituted in (and by) the fabric-ation of the veil ...* It is both her identity and her difference, or it is what makes her identity different. The veil is that which produces woman, or difference; it is spacing, *différance*.<sup>41</sup>

**'The Use of Very Specific, Noticeable Things':  
Establishing the Paradigm of Juxtaposed Signifiers**

Set in Kabul after the downfall of the Taliban regime, Samira Makhmalbaf's *At Five in the Afternoon* tells the story of Noqreh, a young woman desperate for social change in the new Afghanistan.<sup>42</sup> Though her traditionalist father wants her only to receive a religious education, Noqreh attends a secular girls' school, where she dreams of becoming Afghanistan's first woman president. Her attempts to coordinate a presidential campaign, however, are frustrated by the terrible social conditions, including her family's constant search for permanent accommodation and the ill health of her sister-in-law's baby who is dying of starvation.



In a scene at the beginning of the film, Noqreh briefly attends a *Qur-ānic* reading class wearing a blue Afghani *burqu'*, leaving as the *Al-Nūr* verse is being recited (Figure 3.11). She is shown exiting through a door and holding her *Qur-ān*. She then pulls her *burqu'* over her head to reveal her face and takes a pair of white high-heeled shoes from her handbag. The following shot shows her changing into the white heels and putting her old shoes in her handbag, before looking around her then walking towards the camera with her face and clothes visible as her *burqu'* drapes behind her.



Figure 3.11: *At Five in The Afternoon* (2003)

This sequence is particularly interesting in reference to what Gaines refers to as ‘costume’s contribution to telling the story,’ that is to say, in the way in which the Afghani *burqu'* is presented in relation to specific objects which impact on the signification of Noqreh’s dress, namely, the *Qur-ān* and the high-heeled shoes.<sup>43</sup> Here, the use of costume reveals a contrast between the ways in which Noqreh wears the *burqu'* when she appears with the various objects. For example, in shot AFA.2 Noqreh appears carrying the *Qur-ān* with her face and body covered; shots AFA.8-9



reveal her wearing the white shoes with her face and the contours of her body visible. In this sequence, these elements of costume contribute to the narrative through their reference to the religious and secular classes that Noqreh attends, where her attire changes accordingly and the *burqu'* in its varying forms generates different meanings.

In her analysis of Classical Hollywood productions, Gaines refers to the costume historian Anne Hollander, who explains that,

Costumes are so thoroughly identified with bodies that the messages they send are received without acknowledgment, even though an extraordinary emotional power can be generated by the use of very specific, noticeable things – the right use of a black cape, a white scarf, or a pair of bare feet.<sup>44</sup>

As well as generating the kind of 'emotional power' that Hollander here speaks of, Makhmalbaf's combination of various elements with the *burqu'* has the effect of altering the signification of Noqreh's dress. This is witnessed in the scenes described above in which the white shoes and the *Qur-ān* – 'very specific, noticeable things' – contribute to the varying constructions of the *burqu'*. For instance, Noqreh's face and the contours of her body are aligned with the shoes which, as the narrative reveals, signify her desired emancipation. Likewise, the *burqu'* covering her face and body aligned with the *Qur-ān* represents an adherence to traditional religious dictates with regards to public modesty. How then does the apparent tension between desired emancipation and religious tradition engendered by Makhmalbaf through costume contribute to the explication of Noqreh's femininity? Moreover, to what extent is this contrast produced through the opposition of *veiling* and *unveiling*,



and in what way do the shoes and the *Qur-ān* contribute to this polarized signification?

Shots AFA.8–AFA.9 reveal Noqreh adopting an exaggerated ‘feminine’ gait when wearing the high-heeled shoes and exposing the contours of her body, thereby drawing attention to her change in attire (refer to Figure 3.11). Her gait is further illustrated in the following shot as she walks along a sandy path. An old man, upon noticing her not completely covered, turns round and faces the wall. Once Noqreh exits the shot, he turns back and asks God to forgive him for his sins. Here, the shoes are associated with and reinforce Noqreh’s ‘excessive’ visibility, which is further enhanced by the reaction of the old man, whereas in shots that present Noqreh with her *burqu*’ lowered her gait and body are not noticeable.

In the opening sequence described above, the shots in which Noqreh appears *veiled* and holding the *Qur-ān* are accompanied by either the inter- or extra-diegetic sound of a reading from the *Al-Nūr* verse.<sup>45</sup> The reference to this particular section of the *Qur-ān*, which expounds the strictures regarding women’s dress and visibility, contributes to the significance of Noqreh’s changing costume. Crucially, as mentioned in my introduction, the *Al-Nūr* verse is one of only two references in the *Qur-ān* to the notion of women’s body cover. During the *Qur-ānic* reading class scene, the following line is recited: ‘And let them not stamp their feet when walking so as to reveal their hidden trinkets.’<sup>46</sup> Whilst this accompanies the visual image of Noqreh fully covered by the *burqu*’, the shots that immediately follow reveal her changing her attire. This reference from the *Qur-ān*, therefore, directly alludes to the



way the *burqu*' reveals Noqreh's uncovered form, since here her femininity is conspicuous, with her high-heeled shoes exaggerating her gait ('stamping feet') and showing her ankles ('hidden trinkets') (AFA.10-12).

The quotation from the *Al-Nūr* verse contributes further to the opening scene since it expresses the importance of the aversion of the gaze between the sexes. One passage states,

Enjoin believing men to turn their eyes away from temptation and to restrain their carnal desire ... Enjoin believing women to turn their eyes away from temptation and to preserve their chastity.<sup>47</sup>

This precept is exemplified in shots AFA.12-AFA.13 when the old man turns away upon encountering Noqreh's visibility (refer to Figure 3.12). The *Al-Nūr* verse further states that women are 'not to display their adornments (except such as normally revealed); to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to display their finery.'<sup>48</sup> Whilst the old man upholds these principles, Noqreh does not, neglecting to lower her *veil* and displaying her 'adornments' and 'finery' as she walks past. In the opening scenes, therefore, the *Al-Nūr* verse expresses first one notion of femininity, embodied in the depiction of Noqreh as *veiled* and holding the *Qur-ān*, and then an opposed notion of femininity when she appears revealed and wearing high-heeled shoes. The oppositional structuring of *veiled/unveiled* in the use of costume renders the same *burqu*' with conflicting aesthetic discourses, since the signified in one construction stands ideologically in opposition to the signified in the other.





Figure 3.12: *At Five in The Afternoon* (2003)

A further example of the tension between religious tradition and desired emancipation manifested in Noqreh's high-heeled shoes is exemplified towards the end of the film. In this scene Noqreh is worried that her father will discover she owns such a pair of shoes by hearing the sound of her heels echoing within a deserted ruin. Upon realizing her father is looking for her, Noqreh removes the shoes, which are then visually centralized in a medium close-up. When she is alone, Noqreh walks down a corridor and stamps her feet against the floor, allowing the sound of her heels to echo freely. This recalls the *Qur-ānic* line 'and let them not stamp their feet when walking,' and can thus be interpreted as an act of defiance. The sound of the heels signifies a femininity proscribed by the *Al-Nūr* verse that Noqreh refuses to accept, and the sense of the illicit is further demonstrated by the necessity she feels to hide them from her father.

The variations of the *veiled/unveiled burqu'* alongside specific elements of costume signify opposed notions of femininity within a *Qur-ānic* ideological context. Here, to what extent is the viewer's reading of 'specific, noticeable things,' such as the high-heeled shoes, as forbidden entities dependent upon the diegesis of the film? Moreover, how does the opposition of *veiled/unveiled* function to evoke an opposition between the *burqu'* and various objects that stand in seeming contradiction to it?



An interesting reference in this context is evinced in Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Kandahar* (2000) when the protagonist encounters a group of women in the Afghani *burqu'* painting their nails and applying lipstick (Figure 3.13). In these shots, a contradiction is implied between the *burqu'* and the nail polish and lipstick in as far as they relate to female sexuality. One woman places her lipstick and a mirror underneath her *burqu'* in order to apply it without revealing her face, foregrounding the seemingly incongruous relationship between make-up and a covered face. Whilst the ideological connotations of the varying elements do oppose each other, the antagonism in this juxtaposition emerges from the fact that the *burqu'* is stronger in its connotation than its denotation. It is 'heavily connoted,' firstly by its metonymic association with Islam and secondly by the extent to which it has come to signify female oppression in the popular imagination.<sup>49</sup> The alignment of the *burqu'* with lipstick and nail polish inevitably generates a paradox, therefore, regardless of whether we are made aware of the fact that Taliban-controlled Afghanistan did in fact prohibit such aids to beauty.<sup>50</sup> Whilst the lipstick and nail polish in *Kandahar* stand in contradiction to the lowered *burqu'*, in *At Five in the Afternoon* the construction is more complex, for the high-heeled shoes appear when Noqreh is uncovered. Nonetheless, in essence a paradox is produced since in the combination of the high-heels and the *burqu'*, regardless of how it is worn, the signifieds are ideologically opposed. References to the *Al-Nūr* verse contextualize this opposition rather than produce it, since in effect a polarization is generated through the connotative implications of the elements combined.<sup>51</sup>





Figure 3.13: *Kandahar* (2000)

Wendy Ide's review of *At Five in the Afternoon* in *The Times*, entitled 'Rebels Under Their Burkas,' presents an intriguing example of how the fact that the *burqu'* is stronger in connotation than denotation can impact on the way the film is interpreted:

[Noqreh] harbours the ambition of becoming the first female president of Afghanistan but has to smuggle an *illicit* but much cherished pair of shoes *under her burqa [sic]* until her father is out of sight [emphases added.]<sup>52</sup>

Noqreh's shoes are 'illicit' in as far as the diegesis of the film is concerned, yet crucially the narrative reveals her hiding them in her bag and not under her *burqu'*. With its charged symbolism, the *burqu'* opposes the shoes so emphatically in its signification that the film critic mistakenly appropriates this polarization, assuming the shoes are hidden under the *burqu'*. This reading also underscores the manner in which the *Muslim female body* is continuously attributed with an 'interiority' – '*under her burqa [sic]*' – to the extent that a conflation between the bag and the *burqu'* is easily engendered.

The critic's assumption that the *veil* stands in opposition to overt signifiers of femininity is one that is prevalent in many contemporary representations of the



*Muslim female subject*, and can be clearly seen in the conscious juxtaposition of the *veil* with visual elements that stand in contradiction or seeming contradiction to it, be they high-heels, lipstick or nail polish. Further, it is equally important to note, as Barthes explains in 'The Photographic Message,' that the 'signified, whether aesthetic or ideological, refers to a certain "culture" of the society receiving the message.'<sup>53</sup> He continues, the 'code of connotation' is:

historical, or, if it be preferred, 'cultural.' Its signs are ... endowed with certain meanings by virtue of the practice of a certain society: the link between signifier and signified remains if not unmotivated, at least entirely historical.<sup>54</sup>

Needless to say, the juxtaposition of the *burqu'* with objects such as lipstick will not universally be interpreted as incongruous, necessarily depending on the 'society receiving the message'; nonetheless, in this deliberate construction, the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers draws on a 'historical' context of representation which has endowed the *veil* with widely familiar connotative resonance, most significantly that of female oppression.

It is the case, however, that this paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers has developed into a prevalent aesthetic in contemporary visual discourse, most significantly in the articulation of a distinction between East and West, which is itself in effect a by-product and defining feature of Orientalism.<sup>55</sup> As is well documented in postcolonial discourse, the *veil* as a signifier of oppression continues to appropriate this opposition in its historic metonymic association with Islam and the Orient. Its alignment with an 'opposing' signifier embodies what Edward Said defines as 'a



style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and ... “the Occident.””<sup>56</sup> This paradigm, however, is not solely linked to the woman’s question and the expression of the forbidden, since recent examples illustrate its use in the evocation of subjects such as immigration, hybridity, globalization and multiculturalism.

Azadeh Moaveni’s recent autobiography, *Lipstick Jihad* (2005), provides a typical example of the way in which the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers is employed to evoke the theme of displacement, expressed in the subtitle of the book: *A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran*.<sup>57</sup> The cover shows a woman wearing a *veil* and sunglasses holding a mobile phone and standing against a backdrop of Persian calligraphy and tiles (Figure 3.14). The paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers is rhetorically employed in the title, where *Jihad*, a metonym for Islam, connotes an incongruous relationship to lipstick. Whilst the notion of female sexuality (lipstick) is here placed in opposition to *Jihad* and not to the *veil*, the image reveals the *veil* juxtaposed with a mobile phone, which does not oppose the *veil* in *Qur-ānic* ideology, unlike objects that promote female display such as lipstick. Within the context of the author’s hybrid subjectivity suggested by the title, the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers in the visual engenders another opposition, that of tradition and modernity. This polarization is further heightened through references to Persian calligraphy and sunglasses, rendering the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers central to the articulation of the author’s displaced subjectivity.



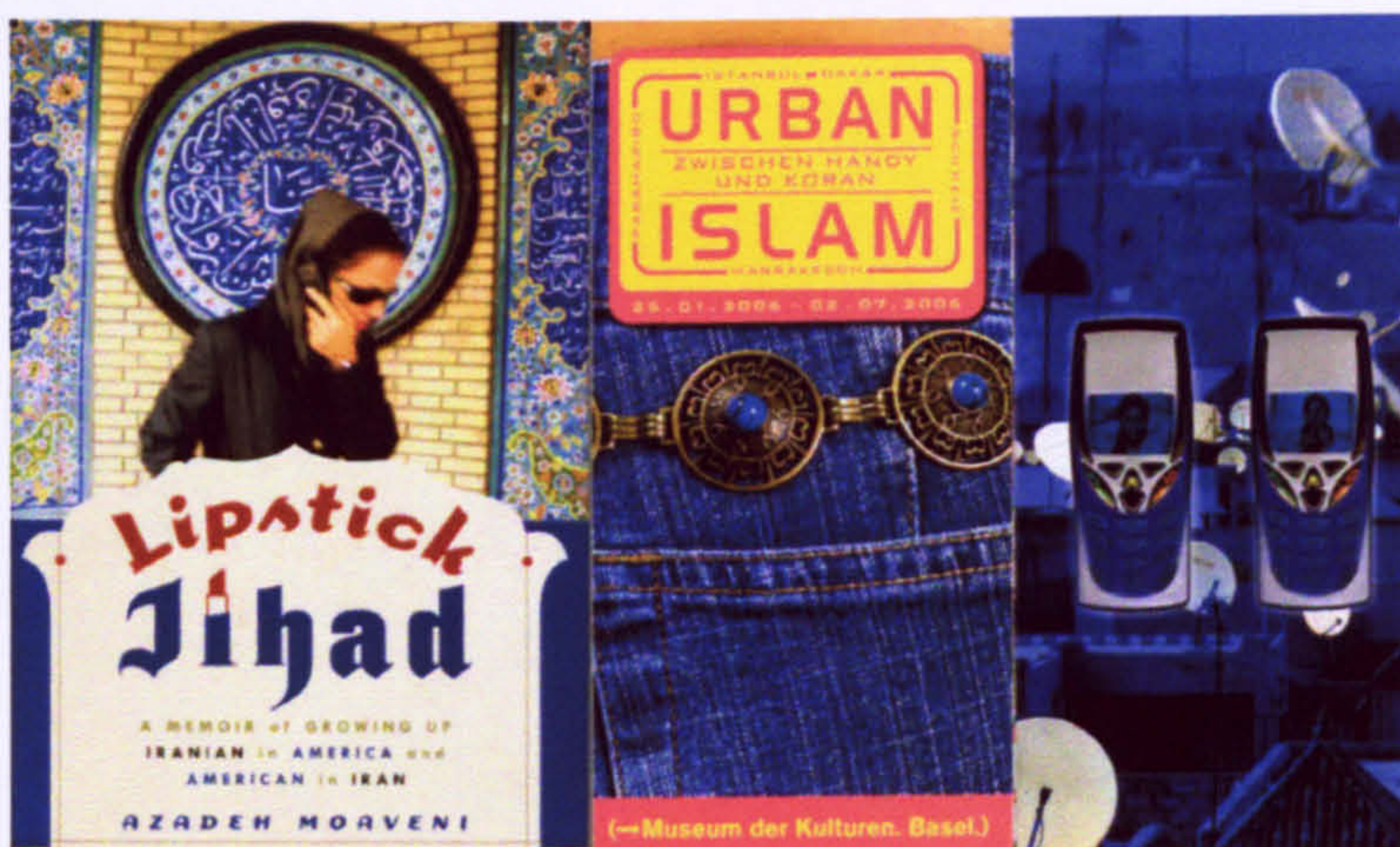


Figure 3.14: *Lipstick Jihad* (2005); *Urban Islam* (2006)

A pressing example of the employment of this paradigm is exemplified in a curatorial project entitled *Urban Islam*, held at the Museum der Kulturen, Basel (2006) (Figure 3.14).<sup>58</sup> The promotional leaflet explains that the exhibition seeks to explore ‘how Islam is lived out by today’s young people in various continents,’ and the title *Urban Islam* is then adjoined with the subtitle, *Between the Mobile and Islam*. As is the case with *Lipstick Jihad*, the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers is here employed in the exhibition title to engender an incongruity between Islam and contemporary popular culture, herein producing the tradition/modernity opposition once again. To illustrate visually ‘how young [Muslim] adults go about their everyday lives in urban surroundings,’ the exhibition’s promotional image employs a reference to denim fabric alongside a brass belt with turquoise stones. The juxtaposition in this composition reveals an East/West, tradition/modernity opposition, which is alluded to through the combination of denim against turquoise stones. This juxtaposition is extended in the title, which appears enlarged in bright yellow and hot pink to underscore the project’s intention to examine contemporary popular culture with reference to Islam, yet another opposition which in its



construction implies that Islam is impervious to change. Interestingly, within the promotional leaflet the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers is emphatically manifested in an image showing two mobile phones. In this instance, the *Muslim female subject*, acting as a metonym for Islam, appears adjusting her *hijāb* in the screens of the mobile phones. Thus, the alignment of the *Muslim female subject* (Islam) against the mobile phone (urbanism) reveals both the prevalence of this paradigm in contemporary cultural practice and the centrality of the *Muslim female subject* in its repeated construction.

Shadi Ghadirian employs a similar paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers in the series *Untitled* (1998) (Figure 3.15). In one portrait, a model in nineteenth century costume and a *hijāb* appears holding a Pepsi can. The *hijāb* and Pepsi can, both 'heavily connoted' signifiers, engender an 'East/West' opposition in their alignment, with the *hijāb* here drawing on its metonymy for Islam. Whilst the construction of binary opposites is rendered simplistic, namely through the employment of 'heavily connoted' signifiers, here the implied contradiction is *aesthetic* rather than *ideological* since in essence, unlike lipstick, nail polish and high-heels, the Pepsi can, like the mobile phone, does not stand in ideological opposition to the *veil*. Within the context of this series, Ghadirian's employment of the Pepsi can draws on Iran's Islamic Revolution and its interdiction of Western commodities and 'values,' where in other photographs a bicycle or stereo are employed in a similar fashion. These references, as is the case with the Pepsi can, are here posited as forbidden entities with reference to Iran's political and social history, in what came to be constituted as Western decadence and the symptoms of cultural imperialism.<sup>59</sup> With



reference to this and the context of the series, the Pepsi can does stand as an ideological reference; the ideology I refer to throughout my argument, however, is that stemming from classical Islamic texts, namely, The *Qur-ān* and the *Sunnah*. An *aesthetic* juxtaposition of signifiers reveals the employment of elements that do not stand in ideological contradiction to the *veil*; however, an implied incongruity between visual elements is nonetheless generated.



Figure 3.15: *Untitled* (1998)

In his analysis of a press photograph of President Kennedy – ‘a half-length profile shot, eyes looking upwards, hands joined together’ – Barthes explains that ‘it is the very pose of the subject which prepares the reading of the signifieds of connotation.’<sup>60</sup> He continues,

The photograph clearly only signifies because of the existence of a store of stereotyped attitudes which form ready-made elements of signification (eyes raised heavenwards, hands clasped). A ‘historical grammar’ of iconographic connotation ought thus to look for its material in painting, theatre,



associations of ideas, stock metaphors, etc., that is to say, precisely in ‘culture.’<sup>61</sup>

In Ghazel’s autobiographical *Me* (2000) series, a video still depicts the artist wearing the *chador* and standing in a balletic pose with the caption: ‘ballet was too girly girly for me [Figure 3.16].’<sup>62</sup> In this composition, a paradox is evoked not through the employment of objects but rather in the artist’s actions. Here, the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers functions within Barthes’ notion of a “‘historical grammar” of iconographic connotation,’ since a balletic stance, ‘a ready made element of signification,’ is not performed in a *chador*. Furthermore, when combined with this pose, the *chador*’s ‘historical grammar’ renders it a signifier of passivity, enforcing a restriction on women’s movements.<sup>63</sup> In this image, an incongruity is implied through the combination of the signifiers active/passive, generating an opposition that is once again primarily aesthetic rather than ideological, namely in the ‘iconographic connotation’ of the elements combined. Whilst this paradox is clearly a subversion of the *chador*’s ‘historical grammar,’ reinforced by the humour in the caption, the signified ‘passive’ is nonetheless upheld in order for a juxtaposition of signifiers to take place.

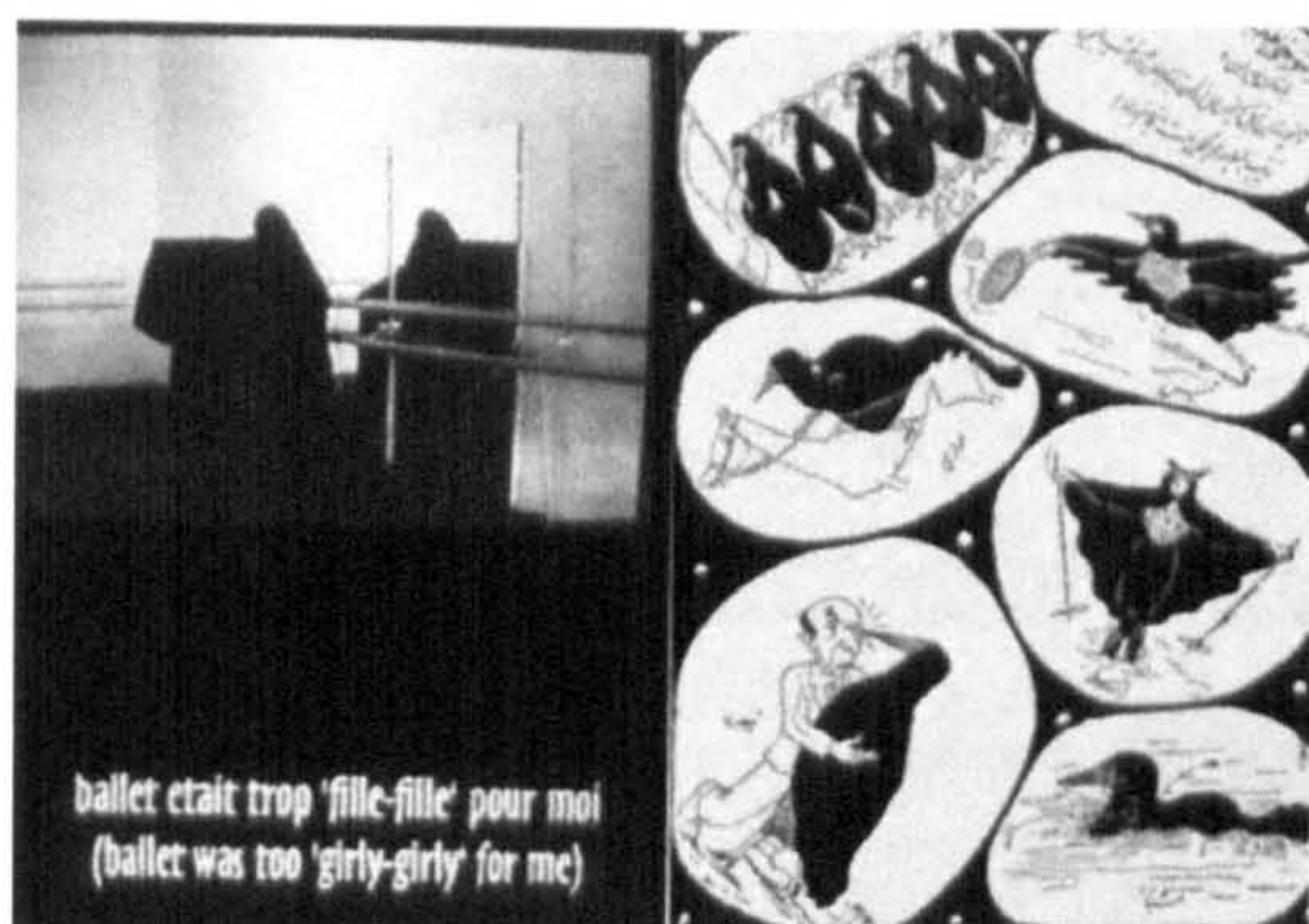


Figure 3.16: *Ghazel, Me* (2000) - *Ettelaat* (1942-3)



Graham-Brown refers to a cartoon in the Iranian weekly magazine *Ettelaat* (1942-3), published during the time the *chador* was reintroduced in Iran after Reza Shah's exile (Figure 3.16). The caption reads, 'Dear women of Iran, whatever you have learnt from the enlightened women of the world, you can put into practice even inside the *chador*.'<sup>64</sup> The cartoon depicts women wearing the *chador* taking part in various physical activities: tennis, skiing, dancing and swimming. It thus conveys a similar sentiment to Ghazel's protagonist appearing in a balletic pose: namely, that the *chador* need not necessarily act to inhibit women's movements. In the cartoon, therefore, the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers illustrated in the cartoon is primarily concerned with the opposition passive/active, where the *chador*'s alignment with passivity is subverted to depict women wearing the *chador* pursuing various physical activities. Indeed, the passive/active opposition arguably stands as a prevalent example of the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers in as far as references to the *Muslim female subject* are inscribed within this construction. Whilst the cartoon referred to by Graham-Brown was published in 1942-3, the currency of the passive/active opposition in representing the *Muslim female subject* nonetheless continues in contemporary cultural practices.<sup>65</sup>

Yeğenoğlu explores what she describes as 'Enlightenment rhetoric (in its feminist career),' which she explains targeted "'backward" and "barbaric" Islamic customs, which are assumed to be central in the enslavement and imprisonment of Muslim women.'<sup>66</sup> She criticizes the assumptions inherent in such writing as follows:



The association of the West with modernity, progress, development, and freedom and the East with the opposites of these features is indeed a phallocentric gesture which is characterized by a binary logic of oppositions. Such a gesture, which associates the Orient with negativity, simultaneously construes it as that which is other-than the established norm ... Within this oppositional structure, the Orient and the condition of its women are represented as the sites of devalued difference.<sup>67</sup>

Yeğenoğlu identifies a 'normative discourse' that upholds the condition of women in the West as the norm, contending that this 'dualistic logic' is part of a system that 'requires the representation of difference as negativity to be able to posit the positivity of the norm.'<sup>68</sup>

In 'Muslim Women and the Veil: Problems of Image and Voice in Media Representations,' Myra Macdonald discusses the underground beauty parlours that existed in Taliban-controlled Kabul, where women would meet in secret and indulge in beauty rituals prohibited by the regime. In this context, acts such as the application of lipstick do become, as she writes, 'expressive more of solidarity than of any desire to emulate a post-feminist bodily ideal.'<sup>69</sup> Indeed, political defiance against oppressive patriarchal structures is at the heart of Makhmalbaf's film, most pronounced in the gender inversion of the averted gaze when the old man turns to face the wall when confronted with Noqreh's uncovered form. However, the director's rendering of beauty rituals as 'very specific, noticeable things' alongside the *veil* nonetheless continues to uphold a 'binary logic of oppositions,' associating lipstick, high-heeled shoes, mobile phones and so on with 'modernity, progress, development, and freedom,' and the *veil* with the opposite, thereby correlating it



with 'that which is other-than the established norm.' Therefore, whether a balletic pose staged in a *chador* or Noqreh in her high-heels, through dress women are rendered as embodying a 'devalued difference,' since a 'normative discourse' is provided in the *veil*'s 'opposing' signifier, the connotations of which (sexual liberation, dancing, and so on) are implicitly presented as constituting the norm. This is also evident in the cartoon, which posits Western liberal modernity ('the enlightened women of the world') as constituting the norm, calling upon *chador*-wearing women to practise what they have 'learnt' from it '*even* inside the chador.' Yeğenoğlu asserts that,

There is a paradoxical mixture of 'the same and yet different' in the logic that recognizes the Eastern woman's difference in so far as it is other-than the Western woman as the norm. In other words, the law of the one, the phallogentric gesture *par excellence*, is operative as long as a norm is erected.<sup>70</sup>

With its particular dualistic logic, Makhmalbaf's representation of opposed notions of femininity through the use of 'very specific, noticeable things' can be deemed such a phallogentric gesture, since the aesthetic discourse generated in one form of dress (*Qur-ān* /*veiled*) upholds 'otherness and difference as negativity' when opposed to the other (high-heels/*unveiled*), with the former construction now constituting the site of 'devalued difference.'<sup>71</sup>



**The Rhetoric of *Unveiling*:  
Upholding the 'Privileged Concept-Metaphor'**

*At Five in the Afternoon* presents a scene in which two girls are seated in a carriage driven by Noqreh's father. The old man preaches that the girls ought to 'wear their veils' and 'not talk to strangers,' insisting that if they do they are to put their fingers in their mouths so as to disguise their voices from sounding feminine, adding, 'don't trade your life for a place in hell.' The two girls then reveal their faces, put their fingers in their mouths and speak. Upon discovering this, the old man asks them to dismount his carriage. Here, the uncovered *burqu*' signifies a form of transgression, highlighted by the way in which it is criticized by Noqreh's father.<sup>72</sup> In thus representing female visibility alongside its open condemnation, Makhmalbaf's representation is rendered resistant to the statements expressed by Noqreh's father, confirmed by his forcing them to dismount the carriage when he discovers they have disobeyed. In this scene, however, Makhmalbaf employs the *veiled/unveiled* dialectic in the articulation of opposed notions of femininity.

Later in the narrative, when Noqreh decides to run for president, she goes to a photographer to have portraits taken for her election campaign. The photographer and her male friend, a poet, contemplate whether she should have a serious or a friendly face. Photographs are taken of her posing seriously and smiling. The photographer then suggests that she should *veil* and that these pictures would be the best of them all. As she appears *veiled* before the camera, the photographer adds that women should stay at home and have children. In an act of defiance, Noqreh *unveils* her face and walks off. In contemplating different facial expressions, Noqreh



attempts to assert her individuality by rendering her own body the site of signification (AFA.14-17) (refer to Figure 3.17). The photographer, however, renders dress the primary signifier of woman since he advocates *veiling*, ascribing to it a traditional concept of femininity and its inherent domesticity. Whilst Noqreh attempts to render her body the site of signification and not her dress, by constructing a dialectic of *veiled/unveiled* upon her body to signify ideologically opposed concepts throughout the narrative, Makhmalbaf re-inscribes a similar reading upon the body of woman as the photographer, rendering the *burqu*' the primary signifier in 'telling' the woman's story.<sup>73</sup>



Figure 3.17: *At Five in the Afternoon* (2003)

According to Yeğenoğlu, Orientalist writing in the nineteenth century revealed that 'the ethico-political program of the Enlightenment in the East cannot be dissociated from a patriarchal subjectivity disturbed by the presence of the veiled woman, fading under her sign.'<sup>74</sup> Referring to Nerval's description of Cairo – 'the town itself, like those who dwell in it, unveils its most shady retreats' – she explains how this writing led to 'a textual dialectic which, with its rhetorical excess, [gave] rise to the tropology of the veil,' rendering this rhetoric

an act of subjective *incorporation*, a transformation of difference into a manipulable and enjoyable object of discourse, hence providing the European with a sense of the fictive unity and command of his experience.<sup>75</sup>



Yeğenoğlu thus contends that, in an Orientalist context, the signifier *veil* engenders different meanings, which then function as tropes in 'representing the Orient, its women, and their dressing.'<sup>76</sup> In this 'Orientalist chain of signification,' the *veil* is 'turned into a privileged concept-metaphor in the construction of the reality of Orient [*sic*]; its very ontology.'<sup>77</sup>

In Shirazi's *The Veiled Unveiled*, referred to in my Introduction, the paradigm of *unveiling* employed in the title is not indicative of the promise of seduction per se, but rather of the promise of truth; that is, of her intention to *unveil* 'the hijab [*sic*] in modern culture.' Similarly, the rhetorical employment of the dominant paradigm in *Behind the Burqa: Our Life in Afghanistan and How we Escaped to Freedom* by 'Sulima' and 'Hala,' establishes an opposition between silence and speech where the *veil*, or rather its lifting, is rendered as a primary signifier in telling that which has hitherto been untold.<sup>78</sup> (refer to Figure 3.18). Countless other publications perpetuate this paradigm, deploying the same 'privileged concept-metaphor' that characterizes Orientalist rhetoric. Judy Mabro's selected essays on Western travellers' perceptions of Middle Eastern women entitled *Veiled Half-Truths* renders both the travellers' accounts and Mabro's own subject position an attempt to present truth through *unveiling*.<sup>79</sup> In *Latifa: My Forbidden Face*, the close-up cover image of a woman in an Afghani *burqu*' whose face is obscured inscribes pictorially the textual paradigm whereby Latifa's forbidden story will now be told (*unveiled*) for the reader.<sup>80</sup> The rhetorical employment of the *unveiling* paradigm is further substantiated within academic scholarship and curatorial and artistic projects. Salient examples include the chosen title of Susan Lipshitz's *Tearing the Veil: Essays on Femininity* and The



Barbican's 2001 film programme, *Unveiled Lives: Women in Iranian Cinema*, amongst others.<sup>81</sup> Woodhull's 'Unveiling Algeria' and Fanon's 'Algeria Unveiled,' referenced in Chapter One, similarly deploy the rhetorical rendition of this paradigm even as they render the colonial discourse of *unveiling* central to their analyses.<sup>82</sup>

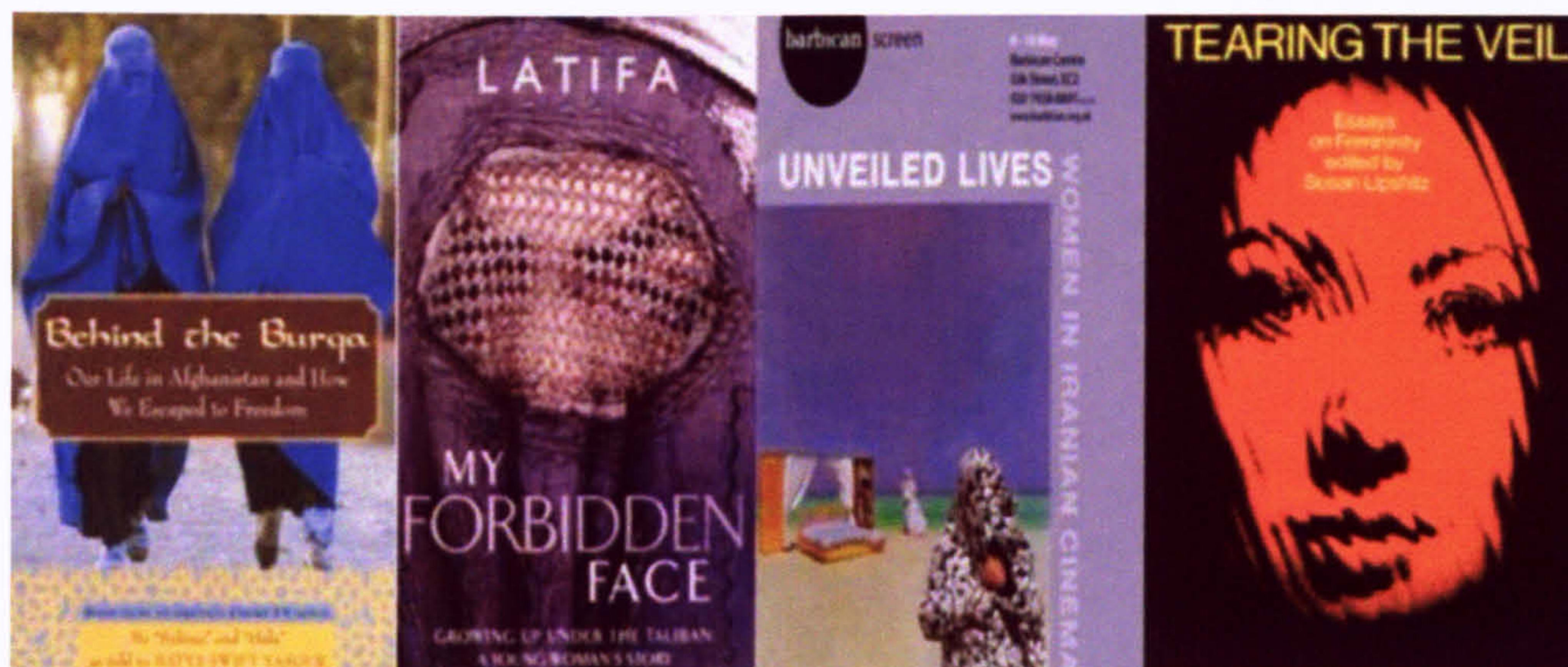


Figure 3.18: *Behind the Burqa* [sic] (2002) *Latifa: My Forbidden Face* (2002) *Unveiled Lives: Women in Iranian Cinema* (2001) *Tearing the Veil* (1978)

This paradigm is appropriated by Makhmalbaf herself in an interview featured on the Artificial Eye DVD release of *At Five in the Afternoon*, in which the Iranian director discusses her relationship to Afghanistan and her motivation in making this film:

We have a lot of refugees from Afghanistan in Iran and we have the same language and culture, they are our neighbours. Before September 11<sup>th</sup> happened there was no image of Afghanistan ... and then after September the 11<sup>th</sup> all the news covered Afghanistan ... they have no representative, a person to talk about what is happening there and I don't feel through satellite or television, BBC or CNN, you can hear the voice or the soul of a people, of a country ... I wanted to see what was happening in Afghanistan after the Taliban regime ... but I couldn't see what was happening there, I couldn't see this woman under the *burqu'*, I couldn't hear her voice.<sup>83</sup>



Makhmalbaf claims kinship with the Afghani people, criticizing the media for first ignoring then providing an inaccurate portrayal of the situation in Afghanistan. In contrast, she states her intention was to provide a faithful image of the country and its people. At the heart of this issue of representation is a debate about 'truth,' with Makhmalbaf claiming authenticity for her vision. In so doing, she positions herself as a representative and mouthpiece for a people whose 'voice' has been hitherto unheard. Significantly, Makhmalbaf expresses her motivation through a figurative reference to *unveiling* – 'I couldn't see this woman under the *burqu*', I couldn't hear her voice' –which, alongside her claimed kinship with Afghani women, characterizes her approach as one of 'subjective *incorporation*.' In *At Five in the Afternoon*, Makhmalbaf's representation of the *burqu*' as a primary signifier in telling 'the woman's story' through the opposition *veiled/unveiled* is thus a continuation of a longstanding tradition in the articulation of gender with reference to Islam. The *Muslim female body* is herein made subordinate to dress, with the *veil* rendered the principal site of signification.

### **The Story of Woman is the Story of the *Veil*: Cinematic Narratives and the Articulation of Gender**

In *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, Gaines argues that,

One can draw a useful analogy between the photographic representation of woman and the everyday adornment of her body. Just as conventional cinematic representation would seem to dissolve without a trace, leaving the distillation 'woman,' costume delivers gender as self-evident or natural and then recedes as 'clothing,' leaving the connotation 'femininity.'<sup>84</sup>



In the courtyard scene in *The Day I Became A Woman*, the *chador* that is being cut, stitched and measured refers connotatively to a femininity that Hava is about to experience. The black headscarf that she wears during her last hour before becoming a woman serves as a prequel to her arrival at womanhood, acting as a symbol for this mediatory stage and encapsulating the process of transformation through dress. Dress thus acts as a key signifier in the articulation of Hava's femininity, with the *chador* adopting a central role in screen discourse. The moment at which Hava becomes a woman is the moment at which she dons the *chador* at the end of the first narrative section. At the strike of noon Hava's precious hour is over. Her mother appears, dresses her in her new *chador* and leads her away from Hassan's house; her transformation is complete, her segregation implemented and her womanhood assumed. *At Five in the Afternoon* likewise employs dress as the dominant signifier of screen discourse, with the variations of the *burqu'* and the use of 'very specific, noticeable things' establishing a tension between conflicting notions of femininity.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler conflates the distinctions between sex and gender, extending the Beauvoirian dictum when she asserts that '*woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end.'<sup>85</sup> In *Bodies That Matter*, she writes,

Gender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones that are almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond ... Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment.<sup>86</sup>



This stands in direct opposition to Gaines' argument that costume delivers gender; indeed, Butler notes elsewhere that she never thought 'gender was like clothes, or that clothes make the woman.'<sup>87</sup> Thus, if we were to read the gendering scene of Hava's assumption of womanhood in light of Butler's comments, *veiling* stands as a forcible citation of a norm, with Hava's donning the *veil* constituting the embodiment of a certain ideal of femininity. Drawing on Butler, the *veil* can be deemed a normative citation that 'governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity.'<sup>88</sup> In the representations of the *Muslim female subject* discussed throughout this chapter, however, the *veil* emerges as the primary site of signification in the articulation of gender with reference to Islam. As such, Butler's declaration that clothes are not like gender, nor do they make the woman, is utterly inverted, since in these representations, gender is indubitably articulated through dress; clothes do not so much make the woman, rather they are the woman.

In her discussion of costume in classical realist cinema, Gaines explains that it 'was severely restricted in what it was allowed to "tell,"' and that 'every element of the mise-en-scene ... serve[d] the higher purpose of the narrative.'<sup>89</sup> Meshkini and Makhmalbaf's films, however, reveal the contrary, since in *The Day I Became a Woman* and *At Five in the Afternoon* the *veil* is not restricted in what it is allowed to 'tell,' for narrative is defined by dress, which literally 'tells' the woman's story. As has been argued throughout this chapter, the woman's story *is* the story of dress since in these narratives it is as much the story of the *Muslim female subject* as it is the story of the *veil*. In *The Day I Became a Woman* this is exemplified in the way in which the spatial and metaphoric renditions of the *veil* occupy the filmic *mise-en-*



*scène*, where the articulation of gender is manifest through an ideological translation of the *veil* on screen. In *At Five in the Afternoon*, the rendition of dress as the primary signifier of woman is evinced in the way the *veiled/unveiled* opposition alongside the use of 'very specific, noticeable things' articulate opposing notions of femininity which constitute the dominant screen discourse of the narrative.

Gaines further states that, 'In the service of narrative ideas costume is assigned one main function: characterization.'<sup>90</sup> This assertion is illustrated in these films specifically in the relationship between the different generations' varying concepts of modesty and dress. However, Gaines continues:

Thus it is that costume is eclipsed by both character and body at the expense of developing its own aesthetic discourse. Bound to character and body, it is socialized, conventionalized, tamed. Like make-up on the face, costume is invisible as it is present, and the irony of the concern over costume superfluity is that the real but unforeseen danger is not in too much costume, but in the total absence of it – the body naked.<sup>91</sup>

Crucially, in the concluding scene of the first story of *The Day I Became a Woman*, through the much-anticipated arrival of Hava's *chador*, costume is as visible as it is present, and with a contrary effect: here the body is 'socialized, conventionalized, tamed' by dress. Similarly, in *At Five in the Afternoon*, in articulating opposed notions of femininity, it is dress that develops 'its own aesthetic discourse' and the body that is eclipsed. The *veil* therefore exemplifies what Gaines refers to as 'too much costume,' or rather 'costume superfluity'; however, in the case of these films, not necessarily at the expense of eclipsing characterization but rather in the way in which dress becomes *the* driving element of the narrative. According to Gaines,



Hollywood directors in the sound era 'consistently insisted that the costume's contribution to telling the story called for subservience to it.'<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, with the narrative structure defined by costume in the films I have been considering, costume is, in these instances, rendered as significant as the story itself.

This relationship between costume and the body, however, is pertinent to the representations of and references to the *Muslim female subject* considered throughout this chapter. The metaphoric renditions of the *veil*, the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers and the rhetorical deployment of the paradigm of *unveiling* demonstrate that the *veil* constitutes the primary site of signification in the articulation of gender with reference to Islam. Following this, in so positing the *veil* these manifestations further illustrate the extent to which the body is herein subordinated to dress. Indeed, this contention is best exemplified in the spatial and metaphoric renditions of the *veil*, which notably extrapolate the body from discourse.

In the light of costume superfluity, Gaines explains how sound and colour threatened to undermine the realist aesthetic, with costume constituting a potential distraction from the narrative.<sup>93</sup> She continues,

Color, like costume detail, could become 'clutter' on the screen unless restricted and held to its character identification function ... If costume did not 'punctuate' the actor against the backdrop the viewer might not be able to 'follow the story.' Here, costume helps to tell the story merely by insuring that the viewer can distinguish the narrative agent from other elements in the mise-en-scene.<sup>94</sup>



In *The Day I Became a Woman*, the *chador* does 'punctuate' the actor, unlike the use of the *haïk* in *Pépé Le Moko* where it merely serves as an element of the *mise-en-scène*. A similar effect is witnessed in *At Five in The Afternoon*, where 'very specific, noticeable things' are used to distinguish Noqreh within the frame, marking her out as a narrative agent against a uniform representation of women in the blue Afghani *burqu*'. Whilst in *The Battle of Algiers* it was the paradigm of *unveiling* that distinguished the female characters against a uniform representation of the *haïk*, in *At the Five in the Afternoon*, rather, it is the *veiled/unveiled* opposition, where the covered and uncovered forms of the *burqu*' adopt contrasting aesthetic discourses which further contribute to Noqreh's construction as the main protagonist in the film.

Whilst the reference to "'clutter" on the screen' in relation to costume superfluity was made with regards to 'costume detail' and not just to costume, the *veil's* 'excessive' visibility does not serve as 'clutter' since it 'is restricted and held to its character identification function.' Furthermore, whilst in Chapter One it was the absence of the *veil* that helped 'to tell the story' merely by insuring that the viewer can distinguish the narrative agent from other elements in the *mise-en-scène*, in the films discussed here the *veil* does not simply contribute to the narrative but rather *becomes* the narrative agent itself. According to Gaines, 'Costume assimilates bodily signifiers into character, but body as a whole engulfs the dress.'<sup>95</sup> In rendering the *veil* the foremost site of signification when representing the *Muslim female subject*, however, it can be said that dress engulfs the body: 'She is what she wears.'<sup>96</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Four Square Books, 1953), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 9. With regards to *veiling* at the age of nine, Meshkini states, 'This rule is not respected in cities. If we cross the street, we see that 90% of nine year old girls have no hejab [*sic*] (Islamic dress code for women). However, in rural communities, a number of people do respect this nine year age stipulation.' *Film International*, Volume 8, Issue 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 25–8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Hassan Al Malaki, *Al-Hadā'iq Al-Ghannā' Fī Akhbār An-Nissā'* (Tunis: Al-Dar Al-Arabiya Fi Al-Kutub, 1997), p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> For a brief yet interesting account of the interpretative variations of Hawwa in Islamic scriptures, see Zuhur (1992), pp. 29–31. Zuhur notes that Hawwa's name in fact does not appear in the *Qu'rān* and that her transformation into temptress, sinner and impure mother of humankind is rooted in the *hadīth*, since she had initially appeared as Adam's spiritual and intellectual equal. Zuhur here employs the Arabic spelling of Hawwah, as opposed to its Persian counterpart, Hava.

<sup>6</sup> While technically, within the narrative structure, Hava is not yet a woman and her segregation from male children not yet prescribed, it can be argued nonetheless that the boys still embody the forbidden subject in this scene. The notion of gender segregation is expressed by Hava's grandmother during the opening sequences of the film and thus imbues her interaction with the boys in this scene with a sense of transgression.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 X a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006), p. 142.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>9</sup> Mulvey's reading of Tahereh's 'unseen look' is subject to the problems in what has been termed 'national allegory' within postcolonial studies. This term was coined by Frederic Jameson in his essay 'Third World Literature in an Era of Multinational Capitalism,' which argues that 'all third world texts are necessarily ... allegorical.' Jameson's position provoked criticism by Aijaz Ahmed, who denounced his claim for 'a totalizing and universalizing tendency that failed to take into account the specificity of Third World cultures.' Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 156. See Jameson in *Social Text*, 15 (Fall 1986), pp. 65–87; Ahmed, 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory,"' in *Social Text*, 17 (Fall 1987), pp. 3–25.

<sup>10</sup> Graham-Brown (1988), p. 85.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>13</sup> Whilst El Guindi primarily focuses on 'Arab culture,' she does, however, make connections with various aspects of Arab-Islamic culture. I refer to El Guindi and Mernissi as key figures on the spatial rendition of the *veil*.

<sup>14</sup> El Guindi (1999), p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 94

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> Mernissi (1985), p. 137.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 31. Mernissi further states, 'The entire Muslim social structure can be seen as an attack on, and a defence against, the disruptive power of female sexuality.' Mernissi (1985), p. 45. In a similar vein, Afshar, who draws on Mernissi's thesis on spatial formations of the *veil*, notes that, 'The most immediate and obvious means of separating and excluding Muslim women from the public sphere has been the veil.' Afshar (1998), p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Personal interview with Marziyeh Meshkini conducted in Tehran, Iran, 28 June 2002. In this interview, Meshkini explained how young girls in films of the early 1990s, such as Jafar Panahi's *The White Balloon* (1994), wore scarves, yet this requirement was no longer necessary by the time she



came to film *The Day I Became A Woman*. Noor Al-Qasimi, *Directing Iranian Style: Interviews* (2002).

<sup>25</sup> While I recognize that Hussein's slave was liberated at the end of the story and comes to signify freedom, her freedom is achieved through male agency. It could thus be argued that freedom continues to be associated with the masculine. I therefore maintain that the dialectical structuring of masculine/freedom and feminine/imprisonment is nonetheless still predominant in this context.

<sup>26</sup> Marziyeh Meshkini, "Movement is Symbol of Life," interview by Jahanbakhsh Nouraei, *Film International*, Volume 8, Issue 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 25–8.

<sup>27</sup> Hamid Naficy in Oliver Leaman, ed., *Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 191.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the *Muslim female subject* as a panoptically positioned observer, see Appendix B.

<sup>29</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), pp. 112–3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> In *The Apple* all the characters play themselves except the mother in the documentary interjection; however, the blind woman who is filmed is in fact the mother in real life.

<sup>33</sup> Foucault, (1977), p. 202.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Samira Makhmalbaf by Charlotte O'Sullivan, *The Observer Review*, 13 December 1998.

<sup>35</sup> El Guindi (1999), p. 95.

<sup>36</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1988), p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> Fanon (1965), p. 44.

<sup>38</sup> Alloula (1986), p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1988), p. 119.

<sup>42</sup> For an illuminating analysis on Western media representations of (post-)Taliban Afghanistan, see: Elisabeth Klaus and Susanne Kassel, 'The Veil as a Means of Legitimization: An Analysis of the Interconnectedness of Gender, Media and War,' in *Journalism*, Volume 6, Number 3 (2005), pp. 335–55; Annabelle Sreberny, 'Seeing Through the Veil: Regimes of Representation,' in *Feminist Media Studies*, Volume 2, Number 2 (July 2002), pp. 270–2.

<sup>43</sup> Gaines (1990), p. 195.

<sup>44</sup> Hollander quoted in *ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>45</sup> In this chapter I use the term 'veiled' for ease of reference though I am aware that the protagonist is wearing the *veil* at all times. By 'veiled' I mean her *burqu* is lowered and not drawn back to reveal her face and body.

<sup>46</sup> 'Light' (24:31), *The Koran with Parallel Arabic Text*, trans. N.J. Dawood (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 352. The subtitles to the film suggest the following translation: 'And women should refrain from dancing that their charms remain hidden.' However, I have opted to use the more accurate Dawood translation since it distinguishes between 'dancing,' a very loose interpretation of the Arabic, and the more precise 'stamping feet.'

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> I refer to Barthes' reading of 'Trick Effects' when using the term 'heavily connoted.' Barthes explains that the 'methodological interest of trick effects is that they intervene without warning in the plane of denotation; they utilize the special credibility of the photograph – this, as was seen, being simply its exceptional power of denotation – in order to pass off as merely denotated a message which is in reality heavily connoted; in no other treatment does connotation assume so completely the "objective" mask of denotation.' Roland Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 21

<sup>50</sup> See Macdonald (2006), pp. 7–23.

<sup>51</sup> Barthes argues, 'Anchorage is the most frequent function in the linguistic message ... The function of relay is less common (at least as far as the fixed image is concerned) ... Here text (most often a snatch of dialogue) and image stand in a complementary relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a



higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis (which is ample confirmation that the diegesis must be treated as an autonomous system).' Barthes (1977), pp. 40–1.

<sup>52</sup> Wendy Ide, 'Rebels Under Their Burkas,' in *Times* 2, 15 April 2004, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Whilst Barthes' discussion in 'The Photographic Message' focuses primarily on the medium of photography, he explains that, 'This duality of messages is evident in all reproductions other than photographic ones: there is no drawing, no matter how exact, whose very exactitude is not turned into a style ... no filmed scene whose objectivity is not finally read as the very sign of objectivity.' Barthes (1977), pp. 17–8.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>55</sup> Said asserts that, 'The boundary notion of East and West, the varying degrees of projected inferiority and strength, the range of work done, the kinds of characteristic features ascribed to the Orient: all these testify to a willed imaginative and geographic division made between East and West, and lived through many centuries.' Said (1978), p. 201.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Azadeh Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> I am grateful to Tirdad Zolghadr for drawing my attention to this exhibition.

<sup>59</sup> The most illustrative example of this is Djalâl Al-e-Ahmad's *Westoxication* (*Gharbzadeghi*), in which he examines the symptoms of the 'disease' he detected among Iranian secular intellectuals and advocated that they reassess their embrace of Western ideas. Djalâl Al-e-Ahmad, *L'Occidentalité*, trans. Françoise Barrès-Kotobi, Mortéza Kotobi and Daniel Simon (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1988).

<sup>60</sup> Barthes (1977), p. 22.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ghazel's work is predominantly shown in moving image as 'video art.' However, I refer to it here as a video-still. There have been cases where the *Me* series has been exhibited in the format of video-still, as for example at the Centre George Pompidou, Paris.

<sup>63</sup> Whilst I am aware that Barthes refers to the term 'historical grammar' in relation to the pose and I use it in relation to the *chador*, perhaps in this context Barthes' discussion on 'ethical connotation' may be more pertinent in relation to an analysis of the *veil*, since he argues, 'Perceptive connotation, cognitive connotation; there remains the problem of ideological (in the very wide sense of the term) or ethical connotation, that which introduces reasons or values into the reading of the image. This is a strong connotation requiring a highly elaborated signifier of a readily syntactical order.' Barthes (1977), p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Graham-Brown (1988), p. 131.

<sup>65</sup> For more on the *Muslim female subject* with reference in relation to the passive/active opposition, See Appendix C.

<sup>66</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 98. In this context, Yeğenoğlu refers to Ruth Frances Woodsmall's *Women in a Changing Islamic System*, published in 1936, who writes: 'change behind the veil is made along lines of Western imitation in clothes with a steady improvement in taste and more discrimination as to suitability in dress ... Social life within the harem [*sic*] now definitely follows the European model.' Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 104.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Macdonald (2006), p. 14. Macdonald refers to Saira Shah's 2001 documentary *Beneath the Veil* and she explains how, despite Shah's extensive documentation of the violence towards Afghani women, 'it is the underground beauty parlour she visits in Kabul that is elevated into "the most subversive place of all."' Macdonald adds, 'The triumph of the "liberation" of Kabul was widely heralded by bodily signs, as in the heading, "Afghan lipstick liberation," given to the BBC's account of the establishment of a beauty school (funded by American money) in post-Taliban Afghanistan' (p. 14).

<sup>70</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 105.

<sup>71</sup> Significant to a feminist reading of the relationship between the *veil* and high-heeled shoes is Adrienne Rich's categorization under the subheading, '*to confine them physically and prevent their movement*.' In her criticism of the *veil* as an inhibitor of women's movement, Rich resists upholding post-feminist bodily ideals as constituting 'the norm' and the *veil* as a site of devalued difference



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since she cites haute couture, 'feminine' dress codes, purdah and foot-binding, amongst others, under the aforementioned category. Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,' in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, Sharon Thompson, eds, *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review, 1983), pp. 177–205, p. 184.

<sup>72</sup> Although situated within the context of Arab dress, El Guindi relates the dress items that are used exclusively to cover the face, partially or completely such as *burqu'*, *qina'*, or *lithma*, where she explains that, 'One property of the veil is its dynamic flexibility, which allows for spontaneous manipulation and instant changing of form. The quality of *pull down to uncover or pull up to cover* provides the wearer with the advantage of instant maneuvering.' El Guindi (1999), pp. 97–8.

<sup>73</sup> For more on the *Muslim female subject* with reference to the opposed notions of femininity, see Appendix C.

<sup>74</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 47.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>78</sup> *Behind the Burqa: Our Life in Afghanistan and How we Escaped to Freedom* by 'Sulima' and 'Hala' as told to Batya Swift Yasgur (New Jersey: Wiley, 2002).

<sup>79</sup> Judy Mabro, *Veiled Half-Truths: Western travellers' perceptions of Middle Eastern Women* (London: Tauris, 1991).

<sup>80</sup> Latifa, with the collaboration of Chékéha Hachemi, *My Forbidden Face: Growing up under the Taliban: a young woman's story*, trans. Lisa Appignanesi (London: Virago, 2002).

<sup>81</sup> Susan Lipshitz, ed., *Tearing the Veil: Essays on Femininity* (London: Routledge, 1978).

<sup>82</sup> Sheida Shirvani's *Voice from Behind the Veil* in *Feminist Media Studies*, Volume 12 (July 2002), pp. 268–70.

<sup>83</sup> *At Five in the Afternoon* – DVD release, Artificial Eye 2004, distributed by World Cinema.

<sup>84</sup> Gaines (1990), p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> Butler (1990), p. 33.

<sup>86</sup> Butler (1993), pp. 231–2.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>89</sup> Gaines (1990), pp. 180–1.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 193–4.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>96</sup> According to Gaines, the relationship between woman and dress works well 'to keep women in their traditional "place,"' particularly with styles 'which accentuate the "natural" contours of woman's body'; it is therefore rare, she explains, that a difference is made between woman and dress: 'She is what she wears.' Ibid., p. 1.



### 3 'Let Your Head Breathe':

#### The Institutionalization of Modesty and the Mobility of the *Veil*

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Before the making of *10*, Abbas Kiarostami's *oeuvre* had been widely criticized for neglecting the female subject.<sup>1</sup> Premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2002, *10* was not only lauded by critics as 'revolutionary' in its filmic approach but was seen as a riposte to this criticism by taking as its subject the lives of women in Tehran. Shot from the dashboard of a car in two static camera angles, *10* reveals a series of ten chapters in which we witness the intense and intimate exchanges between the driver, played by Mania Akbari, and her passengers, all of whom are women, with the exception of her son, Amin.<sup>2</sup> Each chapter is comprised of a different duologue and prefaced by the numbers 10 to 1 consecutively. Akbari, playing the main protagonist, visually dominates the film's *mise-en-scène* through the continual referral to her by the camera positioned on the dashboard of the car (T.1) (refer to Figure 4.1).

My analysis of films by the Makhmalbaf Film House in Chapter Two demonstrated how dress emerges as the primary site of signification through the articulation of opposed notions of femininity and the spatial and metaphoric renditions of the *veil*. *10* presents an interesting accompanying case in that Kiarostami's aesthetic discourse transcends these methods of representation. In this film, Kiarostami provides an alternative representation of the *Muslim female subject* in the way that the *veil* is posited as an element of the characters' 'embodied subjectivity.' Indeed, *10* gained considerable popularity in the West for this very reason, seemingly transcending the stereotype of the *Muslim female subject* commonly delivered to



Western audiences. At the same time, however, the consistent response of Western film critics was to offer detailed accounts of the female characters' costumes on the assumption that there was an incongruity between these signifiers of style and the *Muslim female subject*. Whilst the ideological dimensions of the *veil*, predicated on the censure of female display, generate an opposition between the *veil* and style, the assumption that the *Muslim female subject* herself stands in opposition to style is however informed by a paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers. This assumption upholds the *veil* within its ideological framework, such that the *Muslim female subject* is then posited within discourses of an assumed authenticity.

Within the context of my overarching investigation of the mobility of the *veil*, this and the subsequent chapter are concerned with the emergence of what has been termed as 'new *veiling*' practice, which is described by Linda Herrera as:

a socio-religious practice which has been explained as a form of both resistance and submission to patriarchy, an assertion of cultural authenticity, a reaction against Western imperialism and local secular regimes, a genuine desire by women to live more piously, and a practice born out of economic necessity.<sup>3</sup>

Whilst Chapter Four will engage with the relationship between new *veiling* and ideological constructions of dress, I shall here focus on the employment of one facet of this practice witnessed in *10*, which Herrera has termed 'down*veiling*,' that is, 'less concealing and less conservative forms of Islamic dress.'<sup>4</sup> This historio-specific practice further informs the understanding of the *veil* as *différance* and an element of



an embodied subjectivity, as outlined in my introduction. It also provides a point from which we can begin to interrogate the *veil*'s mobility.

The representation of downveiling on screen arguably marks a significant milestone in the representation of the *Muslim female subject* in Iranian cinema and its institutionalization of modesty. Hamid Naficy's influential essay 'Veiled Vision/Powerful Presences: Women in Post-revolutionary Iranian Cinema' charts the development of representations of the *Muslim female subject* on screen in relation to evolving censorship regulations. One of the principal objectives of this chapter is to explore further the relationship between the *Muslim female subject* and the institutionalization of modesty in light of the proliferation of new *veiling* practices and the absolute evasion of the *veil* on screen. Following this, Kiarostami's *10* provides an illustrative case study for the examination of the *veil*'s mobility, not only in its portrayal of downveiling, but in its presentation of the evasion of the *veil* through the use of a shaved head in its penultimate chapter (T.2) (refer to Figure 4.1). It is important to note, however, that Kiarostami is not the first to encapsulate the transference of the *veil*, and that my analysis also makes reference to other means of evading the *veil*.



Figure 4.1: *10* (2002)



My examination of the transference of the *veil* in this chapter responds to the questions raised in my introduction by the lab coat debate as regards how the *veil* can be either replaced or evaded without transgressing codes of modesty. I position this discussion within the context of Derrida's supplementarity, so to further understand the nature of these substitutions, and how they function within the filmic *mise-en-scène* and in contingent relation to censorship regulations to present parodic recontextualizations of the *veil*. Parallel to this analysis is an exploration of Kiarostami's reanimation of the paradigm of *unveiling*, which emerges as a means of recuperating the female voice. Here, I identify a consistent rendition of the *veil* as the visual and metaphoric embodiment of censorship and silence, which I deem naïve for upholding a universalized notion of patriarchy and for discounting the possibility that the *veil* can also be understood as a means of discursive self-empowerment. The reanimation of the paradigm of *unveiling* is located within the context of a pernicious structuring of *veiling/invisibility/silence* as against *unveiling/visibility/voice*, which continues to posit the *Muslim female subject* upon epistemological ground.

I argue that, although Kiarostami resists rendering the *veil* the sole site of signification in his inscription of new *veiling* practices, he nonetheless continues to articulate the *Muslim female body* through dress in the *unveiling* paradigm. This observation is extended in relation to the production of the *Muslim female subject* as stereotype, where I proceed to consider the extent to which Kiarostami's evasion of the *veil* on screen can be located within this tradition. Finally, this chapter demonstrates that the mobility of the *veil* can operate outside this process of



*unveiling* and, moreover, in the examples of the *veil*'s transference proffered, illustrates that the *Muslim female subject* can exist *not-veiled*. It thus presents a literal enactment of the contention outlined in Chapter Two, namely, that the *Muslim female subject* exists independently of the *veil*.

This analysis centres predominantly on Chapter 2 of *10*, though also examines the opening sequence of Mariam Shahriar's *Daughters of the Sun* (2000). I make extensive reference to the following visual resources from Iran to further support and contextualize my argument: *King Lear* (Davood Rashidi, 1999), *Nasser-Ed-Din-Shah Actor e Cinema* (Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1991), *Tofeha* (Ebrahim Vahidzadeh, 1987), *An Inspector Calls* (Reza Babak, 1999), *Freedom is Boring, Censorship is Fun* (Farhad Moshiri and Shirin Aliabadi, 1992 – 1996) and *Issue 1* (Shahrzad, 2002). Research data also includes an interview with Iran's Cultural Research Bureau (2003) concerning the censorship guidelines issued by Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG).

### **Downveiling and the En-lightening Process**

With *10*'s international acclaim, Akbari herself received a significant amount of attention from the Western press, heightened by her appearance at Cannes during the film's premiere. In Britain, critics paid particular attention to Akbari's appearance in the film, with numerous articles introducing her in a similar manner. *The Guardian*, for example, describes her as a '*beautiful* woman in a loose veil and *stylish* sunglasses [emphases added].'<sup>5</sup> In *Sight and Sound* she is referred to as 'young and *pretty*, wearing a white headscarf and dark glasses, lipstick and several large rings



[emphases added].<sup>6</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* states, 'Mania, the driver, wears lipstick shades and bright rings on her fingers,' whilst Philip French in *The Observer Review* comments:

This woman, who has been taking it all on the chin, turns out to be strikingly *attractive*. Carefully made-up, she wears *fashionable* dark glasses, a white headscarf and smart ankle length dress [emphases added].<sup>7</sup>

On first consideration, it is unsurprising that Akbari's role in *10* would lead critics to describe her dress and physical appearance in such a detailed manner, for she appears in close-up throughout the film.<sup>8</sup> However, the manner in which overt signifiers of femininity, such as lipstick, 'stylish sunglasses' and 'large rings,' are highlighted and arguably juxtaposed with her 'loose veil' is suggestive of the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers established in Chapter Two. Whilst the reviewers may feel it necessary to stress that Akbari's *veil* is worn loosely and that the reference to her sunglasses will provide the reader with a sense of the film's aesthetic and, more importantly, locate the period in which it is set, is it necessary that we be made aware of the fact that she is wearing lipstick?

In *The Social Life of Things*, Arjun Appadurai introduces what he refers to as an 'aesthetics of decontextualization,' defined as a process where 'value ... is accelerated or enhanced by placing objects and things in unlikely contexts.'<sup>9</sup> Whilst Appadurai's argument focuses on commodities 'having social lives,' interestingly he states that 'diversions of things combine the aesthetic impulse, the entrepreneurial link, and the touch of the morally shocking.'<sup>10</sup> The notion of an 'aesthetics of decontextualization' herein informs my formulation of the paradigm of juxtaposed



signifiers. In the case of Akbari, the commodities through which the film critics define her have not only 'social' but also ideological lives. Indeed, Chow writes of this when she argues that, 'the commoditization of "ethnic specimens" is *already* part of the conceptualization of "the social life of things."<sup>11</sup> Thus, references to signifiers of *style* such as lipstick and 'fashionable dark glasses' are nuanced as incongruous when related to the *Muslim female subject* – a diversion of things – hence Philip French's surprise that she 'turns out to be strikingly attractive,' an observation which presupposes that she hereby embodies an ideological conflict, a 'touch of the morally shocking.'

The paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers is repeatedly deployed rhetorically in the reviews of *10*. Julian Graffy in *Sight and Sound*, for example, writes the following:

All of this drama is played out on the streets of vibrant, modern Tehran, glimpsed through windows, heard on the soundtrack, by night and by day. Chadoed women huddle on the street, but this is also a city of mobile phones and satellite TV, of computer programming lessons and health clubs. The lives of women's husbands and boyfriends – unseen yet, unlike them, sometimes given names – also come slyly into focus. In the striking phrase applied to one of them, they are 'full of contradictions,' demanding, peremptory, unreliable.<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, Alexander Walker in *The Evening Standard* states:

Through the windows we glimpse the surprising modernity the capital retains under rigorous Islamic rule, the women in chadors unchanged for centuries who suddenly put cellphones to their invisible ears ... the remainders of the mother's random encounters engrossed me and informed me about the constraints on



women in a Muslim theocracy. But none held me so transfixed as this opening episode – a cross over commentary on family life everywhere, East and West.<sup>13</sup>

These reviews reveal the way in which the *Muslim female subject* is once again primarily articulated through dress, with the practice of *veiling* consistently perceived as a reference in a series of ‘opposing’ signifieds. Moreover, the critics’ rhetoric demonstrates how further ‘contradictions’ are engendered with reference to the *chador*, through the assumption that it stands in opposition to mobile phones, satellite TV, computer programming and health clubs. Interestingly, the phrase ‘full of contradictions,’ spoken in the film by one passenger describing her lover, is here recontextualized and employed within the context of ‘opposing’ signifiers.

The manner in which ‘women in chadors’ are described in the reviews above recalls the instance in Chow’s ‘Where Have all the Natives Gone?’ where she explains how Claude Lévi-Strauss, whilst working on a project on American ethnology, was ‘troubled by the sight’ of a ‘feathered Indian with a Parker pen’ in New York’s Public Library.<sup>14</sup> Chow refers to James Clifford’s reading of this scenario, which states:

For Lévi-Strauss the Indian is primarily associated with the past, the ‘extinct’ societies recorded in the precious Bureau of American Ethnology *Annual Reports*. The anthropologist feels himself ‘going back in time’ ... In modern New York an Indian can appear only as a survival or a kind of incongruous parody.<sup>15</sup>

In her essay, Chow relates similarly how at a faculty search committee at the University of Minnesota a candidate from the People’s Republic of China was



criticized by an American Marxist for expressing pro-capitalist views.<sup>16</sup> She argues that in this particular case what is problematic is 'the assumption that a "native" of communist China ought to be faithful to her nation's official political ideology.'<sup>17</sup> Chow further argues that the Marxist shares the same predicament as that of Lévi-Strauss, namely that 'the stereotypical "native" is receding from view.'<sup>18</sup> She continues to explain that this case expresses not necessarily the 'desire to *archaize* the modern Chinese person, but rather a valorizing ... of the official political and cultural difference of the People's Republic of China as the designator of the candidate's supposed "authenticity."<sup>19</sup> She adds, 'what confronts the Western scholar is the discomfoting fact that the natives are no longer staying in their frames.'<sup>20</sup>

A correlation can be drawn between Chow's argument and the presentation of the *Muslim female subject* in the reviews here discussed. Clifford's contention that the Indian is primarily associated with the past and with 'extinct societies' can be likened to Alexander Walker's description of 'the women in chadors unchanged for centuries.' Furthermore, references to Tehran's '*surprising* modernity' and it being '*also* a city of mobile phones and satellite TV,' where 'women in chadors ... suddenly put cellphones to their invisible ears [emphases added],' render the *Muslim female subject*, like Lévi-Strauss' Indian with his parker pen, as embodying 'a survival or kind of incongruous parody.'

The manner in which Akbari's appearance is described in these reviews, where the *Muslim female subject* is juxtaposed with signifiers of *style*, serves to heighten this effect, since she is invariably associated with the past and with 'extinct societies.'



Following this, the critics' emphasis on the fact that she is wearing lipstick can be situated within the wider context of authenticity. To appropriate Chow's analysis, to nuance signifiers of *style* as incongruous in relation to the *Muslim female subject* demonstrates not 'necessarily a desire to *archaize* the modern [*Muslim female subject*] but rather a valorizing ... of the official [theological] and cultural difference of [Islam] as the designator of the [protagonist's] supposed "authenticity."<sup>21</sup> In other words, the *Muslim female subject* in her 'stylish sunglasses,' lipstick and 'large rings' does not deliver an authentic view of Islamic female modesty since she hereby does not appear 'faithful' to its '*official* ... ideology.' The perceived necessity that the reader be made aware of the fact that Akbari is wearing lipstick suggests the film critics share the same predicament as Lévi-Strauss and the Marxist in Chow's essay, namely the anxiety that 'the stereotypical "native" is receding from view.'<sup>22</sup> In this light, it is plausible to argue that what confronts the critics in their nuanced and consistent references to signifiers of *style* is the discomfoting fact that the *Muslim female subject* is no longer staying in her frame.<sup>23</sup>

In the same essay Chow focuses on the subject of 'the native' as image when, in her criticism of Alloula's reproduction of French colonial postcards, she states that it is important to note 'that what is assumed to be pornographic is not necessarily so, but is more often a projection, on to the images, of the photographer's (or viewer's) own repression.'<sup>24</sup> In other words, whilst the *Muslim female subject* is predominantly articulated through dress and operates within a series of opposing signifiers such as described by the film critics in the reviews here cited, to what extent is this reading of the *Muslim female subject* presented by Kiarostami in *10?* Discourses concerning



the *Muslim female subject* are always ambivalent, as Zayazafoon, drawing on Bhabha in her definition of the 'Muslim woman,' contends: 'this ambivalence is caused by the enunciator's location within an apparatus of power, as she/he negotiates a position from which to speak.'<sup>25</sup> To what extent, therefore, does Kiarostami's aesthetic transcend the articulation of the *Muslim female subject* through reference to the *veil*? Are there instances in the film which exhibit the employment of the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers such as described in the reviews above, or are they merely a projection onto the *veil* and the *Muslim female subject* herself of the critics' 'own repression'?

*Veiling* is first discussed in the sixth chapter of *10*, which begins with the call to prayer as the driver appears wearing a black headscarf. She stops the car at a mausoleum to pick up her friend, who also wears a black headscarf (T.3-4) (refer to Figure 4.2). Throughout, the passenger wears her headscarf loosely whilst the driver wears hers noticeably tighter than in previous scenes. The passenger explains that the reason she has been coming to the mausoleum is for her prayers regarding marriage to be answered. The driver asks, 'They let you in without the *chador*?' to which the passenger explains that she has one in her bag. The driver states that yesterday she went in without the *chador* but today she was not allowed – 'maybe because it's Friday' – and adds that some mausoleums loan them to women who do not have one or who are not *veiled* correctly.





Figure 4.2: *10* (2002)

Chapter 2 of the film features the same passenger that appears in Chapter 6. Looking at the road straight ahead of her, the driver continues their previous conversation: ‘If I remember rightly, last time, you said he was full of contradictions.’ The women then discuss the passenger’s unrequited love for a man who has left her for someone else. The driver asks, ‘Are you modest? Why is your *veil* so tight?’ She continues that it does not suit her, following which the passenger loosens it slightly and looks at herself in the mirror. In this scene the two characters wear white headscarves in a contrasting fashion to Chapter 6, since here the passenger wears hers tightly around her head whilst the driver wears hers loosely (T.5-6) (refer to Figure .4.2). Whilst both chapters are connected structurally by the same characters, who continue their conversation, they are further linked through costume, namely in the style in which the headscarves are worn (loose/tight and vice versa) and in their colours (both black/both white). These contrasts are foregrounded within the narrative structure by the fact that these scenes are the only instances where *veiling* is discussed in the film.



Chapter 6 is also thematically linked to Chapter 8 in that they both refer to a journey either to or from the mausoleum. In Chapter 6 we witness the passenger entering the car and notice that she is wearing a dress; Chapter 8 also reveals a passenger entering the car, this time an old woman who appears in a *chador*. Further, both scenes take place on a Friday, and whilst Chapter 6 begins with the call to prayer, Chapter 8 ends with it. Another association between the two chapters is realized within the frame, for in both the mausoleum is shown through the driver's window, but in Chapter 8 a group of women wearing *chadors* stand outside it, whereas Chapter 6 only reveals the exterior of the building (T.7-8) (refer to Figure 4.3). Whilst these various elements link the two chapters structurally, Chapter 6 in fact opposes Chapter 8 in as far as the *chador* is concerned, for it references an absence of the *chador* and women who do not *veil* 'correctly,' whilst Chapter 8 does the contrary since the *chador* is visually dominant within the frame.



Figure 4.3 *10* (2002)

Whilst the scenes described above illustrate Kiarostami's presentation of the multidimensionality of the practice of *veiling*, the structural and thematic interplay within the three chapters further reveals how modesty functions in relation to the debate on the practice of 'new veiling.' In her article 'Downveiling: Gender and the Contest Over Culture in Cairo,' Herrera coins the term 'downveiling' to describe the increasing prevalence amongst certain groups of Egyptian society of 'less concealing and less conservative forms of Islamic dress.'<sup>26</sup> The introduction to the article



explains that the dimension of *downveiling* contributes to the debate on new *veiling* in Egypt, which she explains was initiated in the early 1970s by students at Islamic universities 'on a voluntary basis and sometimes in tacit opposition to the nominally secular state.'<sup>27</sup> She defines *downveiling* as the product of four factors: 'the state's attempt to curb private, embodied expressions of Islamism, the social influence of youth culture and the growth of Islamic urban chic, the practical needs of urban women and the emergence of new players on Egypt's stage of cultural politics.'<sup>28</sup>

In 'Downveiling: Shifting Socio-Religious Practices in Egypt,' Herrera traces a growth in the practice of *downveiling* in Egyptian schools in the mid 1990s.<sup>29</sup> She argues that the decision to *downveil* 'was never explained in association with a crisis of faith or a retreat from religion ... rather, downveiling appears to be more of a relaxing of socio-religious practices spurred largely by practical reasons.'<sup>30</sup> Herrera thus explains that the 'trend of downveiling among Cairene women is suggestive of the ways in which gendered practices respond and contribute to socio-religious change and indicates a relaxation, or changing of form, of the Islamist trend in Egypt.'<sup>31</sup>

Whilst Herrera's research is conducted in Egypt, where she observes the increased 'Islamization' of public spaces and social institutions, which in turn enforces an Islamic uniform (*zayy Islammy*) in certain schools, in Iran by contrast *veiling* is legally enforced by the state. In the context of my analysis, Herrera's study nonetheless provides an interesting reference in as far as the term *downveiling* is concerned, which I herein employ to refer to a 'less concealing and conservative' form of *veiling*.<sup>32</sup> The sixth and second chapters of *10* exemplify the appropriation of



downveiling in the characters' costumes, where the passenger's 'upveiling' (the converse effect) in the opening of Chapter 2 leads the driver to ask, 'Are you modest? Why is your *veil* so tight?' Further, the reference to downveiling in Chapter 6 is juxtaposed against the driver's statement that mausoleums loan *chadors* to women who are not *veiled* correctly.

In *At Five in the Afternoon* the variation of *veiled/unveiled* is inscribed in Noqreh's costume to signify ideologically opposed concepts throughout the narrative. In 10 these variations are not rendered solely in relation to a single character to engender contrasting screen discourses. It could be argued that references in this film to the *chador* and a correct way of *veiling* denote ideologically opposed concepts of femininity when aligned against the fact of the characters' downveiling. However, unlike Makhmalbaf's categorical compositions of the *burqu'*, Kiarostami's presentation of opposed notions of femininity is rendered within the diegesis itself, namely in the way in which Chapters 8 and 6 relate to one another structurally. In these chapters references to the mausoleum, Friday, the call to prayer and the *chador* stand as metonyms for Islam; through the *chador's* visual dominance in Chapter 8 and absence in Chapter 6, ideologically opposed concepts of femininity are thus rendered diegetically.

Whilst Chapters 6 and 2 are structurally linked through costume, where the passenger's and driver's headscarves vary in their forms and are aligned in their colour, in these scenes Kiarostami's presentation of upveiling and downveiling is subtly referenced and thus avoids the categorical composition evinced in the polarized forms of Noqreh's *burqu'* (refer to Figure 4.2). Indeed, with all the



characters in *10* appearing in varying dress throughout the narrative, ideologically opposed notions of femininity are not invested in the protagonist's costume, unlike in *At Five in the Afternoon* where Noqreh is 'punctuated' against a uniform representation of the blue Afghani *burqu*', her dress rendered the primary site of signification.

In *Three Faces of Beauty*, which focuses on the institution of the beauty salon in Cairo, Paris and Casablanca, Susan Ossman contributes to new *veiling* discourse by examining how contemporary *veiling* practices relate to concepts of fashion:

Fashion sets times in motion that promise progress but confuse linear history ... Perhaps, more than anything, it makes us think about how the process of 'en-lightening' practices and bodies that makes them part of fashion requires a certain sense of revulsion at the sight of the heaviness and stasis that we conceive as giving birth to those very forms.<sup>33</sup>

Ossman continues by describing a 1996 Cairo fashion show in which '*ten black-and-white figures remove their veils and take a second walk down the aisle.*' She explains that this reveals 'a distinct way of telling the tale of women's unveiling' and indicates how the *hijab* [*sic*] is considered 'a sign of such heaviness.'<sup>34</sup> She adds that in 'discarding veils, excess hair and clothing the process of en-lightening seems necessary to the development of fashion and the realization of the ideal of the anywhere body.'<sup>35</sup> Ossman later explains how to some people 'the *hijab* [*sic*] is perceived as a way of halting fashion,' quoting one student in Cairo who claims 'a woman who doesn't wear the *hijab* [*sic*], it's certain that she will be swept away by



the flood of fashion.’<sup>36</sup> She adds, ‘and yet the *hijab* [sic] itself is sported by models in magazines specializing in fashion for *muhajibat* [sic],’ further contending that,

The fact that more and more ‘background styles’ seem to be becoming light and emerging as figures of ‘la mode’ shows once again the power of the enlightening process. We must keep in mind that even a fashion conscious *muhajiba* [sic] relies on the heavy, indistinct contours of background bodies to validate her own demonstration of making choices about what to wear.<sup>37</sup>

Crucially, such discourse marks a transformation in contemporary *veiling* practices, where Herrera uses ‘downveiling’ to describe a ‘less concealing and conservative form of Islamic dress’ or a change in ‘religious embodied practices,’ whilst Ossman contributes to this debate within the context of fashion by suggesting that ‘the enlightening process’ distinguishes *muhajibat* [sic] from ‘background styles’ or ‘background bodies’ which are considered a sign of ‘heaviness.’

A case of both *downveiling* and the en-lightening process is illustrated in a fashion spread entitled 75% featured in the Middle East Arts and Culture magazine *Bidoun*. Dedicated to the ‘beautiful youth’ of Iran, 75% presents an ironic staging of neo-Orientalist paradigms, where an ‘aesthetics of decontextualization’ is evinced in the juxtaposition of contemporary fashion and the backdrops or props which come to signify the local, the traditional and the authentic.<sup>38</sup> The opposition between tradition and modernity is further reinforced in the art director’s conscious staging of juxtapositions, for as he states, ‘archetypes have been twisted, enhanced and collaged with modern day images ... fabrics were purchased in Iran ... they were



altered, cut and pinned to create a new look that juxtaposes the past, the present, and the future.’<sup>39</sup>



Figure 4.4: *Bidoun* (2005)

One image from the series reveals a woman wearing a trench coat, a pair of trousers and a bandana around her head (Figure 4.4). The presentation of the *mutahajjibah* here demonstrates that she can be clearly distinguished from ‘background bodies’ precisely by ‘making choices about what to wear.’<sup>40</sup> Herrera’s definition of *downveiling* is relevant here since in this image the attire is rendered a manifestation of ‘Islamic dress,’ which in Iran is legally enforced by the state. At the same time, however, the attire also recalls the style of Audrey Hepburn, whose face appears on the handbag, through iconic signifiers of her style such as the trench coat and sunglasses. With the en-lightening process clearly demonstrated in this image, to what extent is an incongruity engendered between the *Muslim female subject* and signifiers of style?



In this image the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers is evoked between signifiers of the local, such as the Iranian flag, and iconic signifiers of Western style, that is, the face and by extension *style* of Audrey Hepburn. In other words, the sunglasses, trench coat and bandana – an en-lightening process – are here situated within a series of ‘opposing’ signifiers of the local and Western style. The en-lightening process herein stands in contradiction to the *mise-en-scène* itself, further extended by the fact that Hepburn’s hair is visible while that of the woman is not. The art director’s contention that, ‘clad in vibrant color, sheer scarves, cuffed capris and metal tee shirts, these Iranians have altered preconceived images of a theocratic country,’ further foregrounds the centrality of ideologically opposed notions of dress in his articulation of contemporary fashion in Iran.<sup>41</sup>

In this image, through an ‘aesthetics of decontextualization,’ the *Muslim female subject* is once again inscribed within the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers. The *style* of Audrey Hepburn engenders an incongruity within the *mise-en-scène*, namely in the way in which it renders the concept of style itself as Western, yet further extended by an implicit juxtaposition with the local (the Iranian flag). The en-lightening process and signifiers of style are in this instance emphatically inscribed as contradictory in the way in which they are consciously located within an opposition between East/West and tradition/modernity.

In a different manner, through the en-lightening process of Akbari’s costume, signifiers of style in *10* are not rendered Western as such, but rather are presented as part of the protagonist’s ‘embodied subjectivity.’<sup>42</sup> The *Muslim female subject* is not,



for example, constructed through the juxtaposition of elements of costume (sunglasses, lipstick, large rings and loose *veils*) to generate ideological oppositions, as is the case with Noqreh's shoes (a 'very specific, noticeable thing'). Kiarostami's presentation of the multidimensionality of contemporary attitudes to dress is evinced within the narrative, most significantly in the costume of the protagonist and the passenger in Chapters 6 and 2. Social specificity is here rendered diegetically through the inscription of new *veiling* practices, which in turn reveal how the *Muslim female subject* distinguishes herself from 'background styles,' such as the *chador* featured in Chapter 8 and the *maghnaeh* (head covering) in Chapter 9 (T.9-10) (refer to Figure 4.5).<sup>43</sup>



Figure 4.5: *10* (2002)

The British film critics' interpretations of the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers contend that it is in fact the en-lightening process which stands in opposition to the *Muslim female subject*, regardless of the fact that, as Ossman writes, it represents 'the realization of the ideal of *the anywhere body*' [emphases added].<sup>44</sup> To these critics, therefore, the en-lightening process decontextualizes the *Muslim female subject* such that she no longer stays in her frame and appears unfaithful to Islam's 'official ... ideology.' In this light, questions of 'authenticity' are centralized when reading the *Muslim female subject*, with the en-lightening process acting as an



impediment to this process, hence the critics' perception that it is necessary to foreground the fact that she wears lipstick.

### **Shaving Heads: Inventing the *Muslim Female Subject* and the Transferability of the *Veil***

In his essay 'Veiled Vision/Powerful Presences: Women in Post-revolutionary Iranian Cinema,' Hamid Naficy charts the growing presence of women on screen in relation to censorship from early post-revolutionary Iranian cinema through the 1980s.<sup>45</sup> The institutionalization of modesty, he explains, established by regulations set in 1982, 'necessitated a "purification" process for women on and off screen,' who had to abide by "Islamic" codes of modesty involving dressing, looking, behaving, acting, and filming.'<sup>46</sup> Naficy argues that the evolution of female presence occurred in three identifiable and interconnected phases, which he relays as 'absence,' 'pale' and 'powerful.'<sup>47</sup> During the first phase in the early 1980s, 'images of unveiled women were cut from existing Iranian and imported films [or] ... the offending parts were blacked out directly in the frames with markers,' whilst in 'local productions, women were excised from the screens through self-censorship.'<sup>48</sup> In the second phase, which occurred in the mid-1980s, women appeared 'as ghostly presences in the background or "domesticated" in the home environment.'<sup>49</sup> Naficy explains that,

An aesthetics and grammar of vision and veiling based on gender segregation developed, which governed the characters' dress (long, loose-fitting), behavior and acting (dignified, no body contact between men and women), and gaze (averted look, no direct gaze). The evolving grammar of filming discouraged close-up photography of women's faces or of exchanges of



desirous looks between men and women. In addition, women were often filmed in long shot and in inactive roles so as to prevent the contours of their bodies from showing. Both women and men were desexualised and cinematic texts became androgynous.<sup>50</sup>

The third phase, which has emerged since the late 1980s, has seen the steady increase in female presence in cinema, with the proliferation of significant leading roles for women on screen and behind the camera.<sup>51</sup> In light of Naficy's argument, it could be said that this development, coupled with the relaxing of censorship regulations, precipitated a transformation in the cinematic representation of the *veil*, with the gradual legitimization of *downveiling* on screen.

Rakhshan Bani-Etemad's *Nargess* (1992), which follows the 'third phase' of Naficy's study, employs the newly permissible representation of *downveiling* as an important element of characterization. The contrast between the two principal female characters established by the narrative is compounded by differences in the way they are dressed. The narrative implicitly suggests that Afagh is a prostitute, and she appears smoking and swearing in public and wearing heavy make-up; moreover, she is noticeably *downveiled* (Figure 4.6). The title character, Nargess, on the other hand, is presented as her antithesis, appearing *upveiled* and in accordance with principles of modesty in dress.<sup>52</sup> However, her 'prescribed' representation extends merely to costume since we witness her running with the male lead of the film, Adel, in pursuit – women previous to this film were rarely seen to be 'active' so as not to draw attention to the female form.<sup>53</sup> *Nargess* ends with an image of Afagh dying on the side of the road, with her *downveiling* and 'immodest' characterization made permissible by this final moral condemnation of her



behaviour. Furthermore, whilst Bani-Etemad references *downveiling* in the context of the sexual polarization of the female protagonists, *Nargess* could be considered audacious in its referencing of the *Muslim female subject* – the more so due to the fact that it was made before Khatami's election as president in 1997, after which restrictions on women's appearance on screen were further relaxed.<sup>54</sup> In the image in Figure 4.6, Afagh appears heavily *downveiled*; her *veil* does not function to conceal her hair, nor to uphold a modest representation. In view of this, what is the relationship between the *Muslim female subject*, the *veil* and hair where modesty codes are concerned? Is the *veil* referenced within the frame merely to fulfil a requirement of censorship regulations?

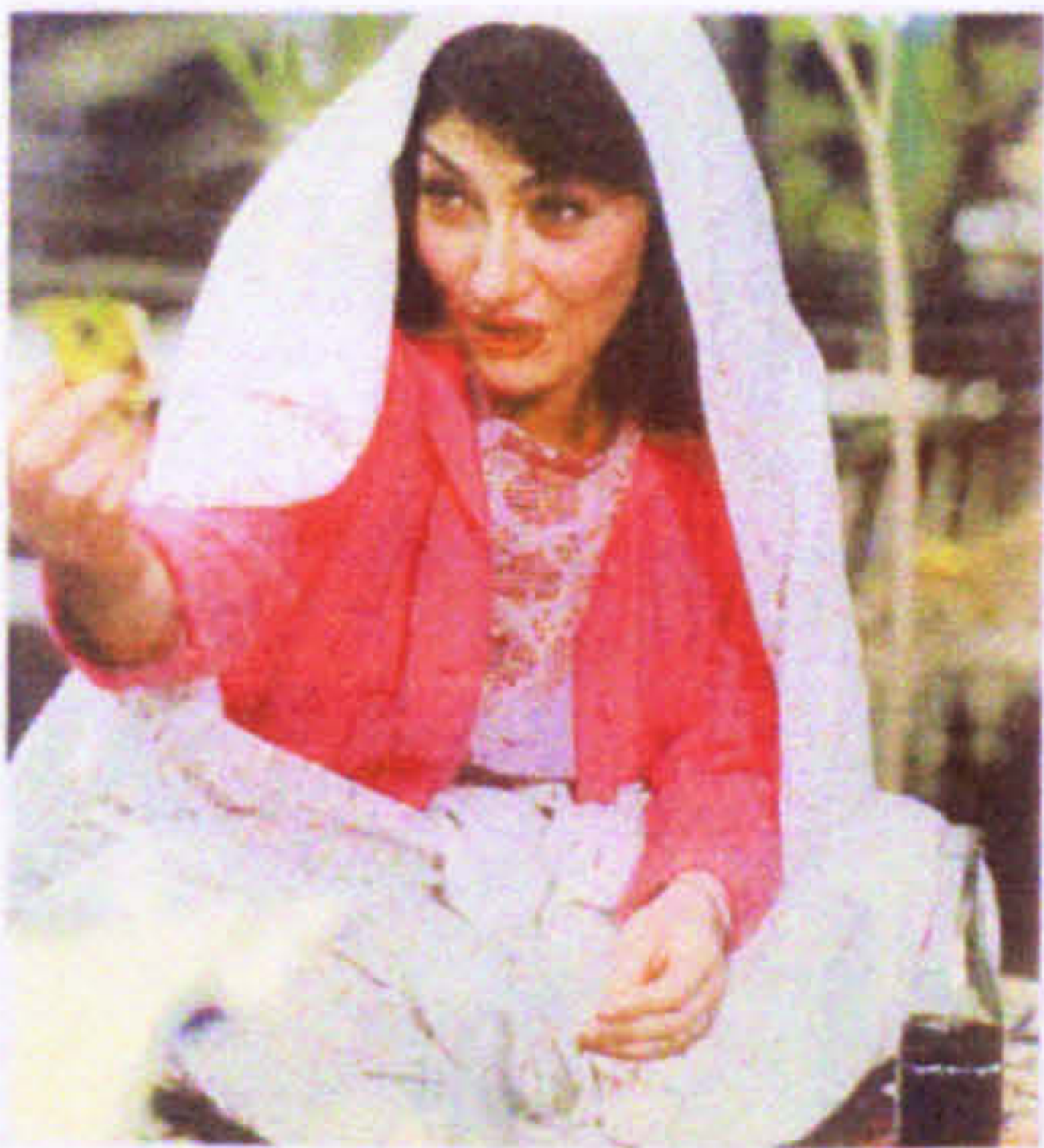


Figure 4.6 *Nargess* (1992)

In her 1981 essay 'Women and Shi'ism in Iran,' Mina Modares stresses the importance of understanding the position of Iranian women in light of the construction of woman within *Shi'ism*.<sup>55</sup> Modares refers to the *Shi'i* scholar Ali Shari'ati, whose *Fatima is Fatima*, published in 1975, offers one of the most thorough and influential analyses of women in *Shi'i* scholarship, most importantly for translating religious dictates into 'a popular political ideology.'<sup>56</sup> Modares explains how Shari'ati 'stresses the liability of a woman to "make" herself, to



“create” herself,’ thus rejecting the *Shi’i* preoccupation ‘with regulating the sexuality of women, and the subsequent endless discussions about their legal and social position.’<sup>57</sup> What made his discourse so desirable amongst women in Iran, she writes, was that ‘the only meaning the question of the *hejab* [*sic*] has for him is that its observance *in a moderate way* would operate against the interest of the consumer sex-obsessed society.’<sup>58</sup>

Within the same wave of scholarship that engaged with the post-revolutionary position of women in Iran, Azar Tabari’s ‘The Enigma of Veiled Iranian Women,’ published in 1980, refers extensively to Shari’ati’s discourse in relation to the ‘Mujahedden [*sic*] Guerilla Movement’ and its attempt to establish ‘a “new” interpretation of Islam.’<sup>59</sup> Tabari explains that for ‘Mujahed [*sic*] women the *chador* was not at all something Islam required. Any “modest” clothing would do.’<sup>60</sup> Referring to Shari’ati, who argued ‘vehemently’ against ‘traditional Islam,’ Tabari states,

According to him, this ‘traditional Islam’ recoils against modernization of any sort by branding it *haram* [*sic*] (absolutely forbidden) ... Shari’ati held this ‘traditional Islam’ as opposed to ‘real’ Islam responsible for losing women from the faith ... [and] advocated a new image for the Muslim woman; that of the early Islamic period ... [where] a woman should always take as her point of departure: ‘the history, culture, religion and society whose soul and capital comes from Islam.’<sup>61</sup>

In stressing ‘the liability of a woman to “make” herself, to “create” herself,’ Shari’ati’s discourse offers a progressive reading of the practice of *veiling* and provides a legitimized interpretation of how constructions of the *Muslim female*



*subject* operate within both the fashion system and contemporary visual culture, as illustrated in the image from *Bidoun*'s fashion spread, where Islamic codes of modesty are challenged but necessarily maintained.

Significantly, Shari'ati's contention regarding the ideological transformation of dress is situated in a particular context, for it emerged during a period that witnessed the proliferation of political and social contestation, and is rooted in *Shi'i* thought. The idea of a transformation of dress, from the *chador* to 'any "modest" clothing,' brings to mind the lab coat debate discussed in my Introduction, which though executed within the context of Saudi Wahhabism is nonetheless pertinent, since the lab coat can be deemed a site in which modesty is upheld independently of the '*abāyah*. Thus, Shari'ati's deliberation concerning the transformation of dress and the view that 'any "modest" clothing would do,' offers a further way of understanding the transference of the *veil* and, moreover, provides a site in which it can be executed in accordance with *Shi'i* jurisprudence.

In my Introduction I asked whether the transference of the *veil* can be understood in terms of Derrida's notion of supplementarity, since it embodies the operations of replacement and addition, 'substitution and accretion'?<sup>62</sup> I questioned what the limits are when substituting the *veil*, and how these substitutions – taking the place of the *veil* – continue to uphold conceptions of Islamic female modesty such that they are rendered tantamount to the *veil* itself? Whilst Shari'ati attempts to provide a legitimized interpretation of the transformation of dress, an institutionalized and ideologically formulated concept of dress, such as the *maqna'i*, is mandatory for



women who appear on state-run television stations (Figure 4.7).<sup>63</sup> This proscription exemplifies the extent to which constructions of the *Muslim female subject* are rendered central to Iran's articulation of Islamic national discourse, whereby institutionalized forms of dress, and by extension Islamic codes of modesty, are strictly controlled by the state.<sup>64</sup>



Figure 4.7: *Channel 6* (2002)

In an interview I conducted with Mohammed Hassan Khoshnevis, the Director of Iran's Cultural Research Bureau, he stated that, hypothetically speaking, if a foreign woman were to play a part in an Iranian production she does not necessarily have to be *veiled*.<sup>65</sup> In other words, the rules and regulations set by Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) are predominantly concerned with Iranian women. This stands as yet another example of the centrality of the *Muslim female subject* in as far as the relationship between her construction on screen and Islamic national discourse is concerned. Within the field of visual culture, however, the transference of the *veil* operates within a wider context of censorship regulations since, as Naficy contends with regards to Iranian cinema, rules set by the MCIG initiated a longstanding tradition of employing a 'poetic language' on screen.<sup>66</sup>



Indeed, representing the transference of the *veil* through ‘sign and proxy,’ in order to work within the regulations of censorship, is exhibited in a number of cultural productions from Iran (Figure 4.8). In a photograph of a 1999 Iranian theatrical production of *King Lear* by Davood Rashidi, Cordelia appears wearing a crown, a blonde wig and a *veil*. Given that the wig conceals her hair, the *veil* in this instance no longer performs this function but rather is referenced symbolically in her construction. The image in Figure 4.4 from the *Bidoun* fashion shoot discussed previously, however, presents the contrary effect, since the *veil* is evaded symbolically through the en-lightening process: it is substituted by a bandana which serves to conceal the woman’s hair.<sup>67</sup>



Figure 4.8: *King Lear* (1999); *Nasser-Ed-Din Shah-Actor e Cinema* (1991); *Tofeha* (1987); *An Inspector Calls* (1999)

In Mohsen Makhmalbaf’s *Nasser-Ed-Din Shah-Actor e Cinema* (1991), the female lead is shown wearing a scarf and a wig. Here, the wig conceals the actress’ real hair but the *veil* is nonetheless alluded to through the scarf. In *Tofeha* (1987) by Ebrahim Vahidzadeh, we are presented with the opposite effect: a wedding scene in which a



white bridal *veil* ensures that no hair is visible within the frame. The high neck of the bride's dress and the band across her forehead typify the practice of *upveiling*, also evident in the women in the foreground who wear hats and high turtlenecks to conceal their hair and necks. In a television production of *An Inspector Calls* (1999) by Reza Babak, we witness a similar instance in which the *veil* is manifested through costume substitution – once again the use of a hat and the high neck of a dress – yet unlike in *Tofeha* (made at an earlier time), the woman here is *downveiled* since her hair is visible. These examples demonstrate some of the permissible ways of presenting the *veil*'s transference through costume, where modesty is upheld through the manifold gradations of up- and downveiling.

Crucially, whilst modesty continues to be maintained on screen in such instances, it could be argued that, through the material evasion of the *veil*, the visual signifier of Islamic ideology is detached from the *Muslim female subject*. The image of Afagh in Figure 4.6 presents an opposing representation of the *veil* to these examples, since the *veil* continues to be referenced within the frame, yet codes of modesty are not necessarily maintained as a result of the character's conspicuous downveiling. These varying employments establish the relationship between the symbolism of the *veil* and its function: portraying the transference of the *veil* through costume substitution evades the symbolism of the *veil* yet nonetheless maintains its function, continuing to operate within codes of modesty. By contrast, the symbolism of the *veil* is of primary importance in the construction of Afagh since its appearance within the frame no longer functions to maintain modesty codes in relation to the character's attire.



Whilst these examples serve to illustrate how the transference of the *veil* is executed within the context of censorship regulations through costume substitution, the evasion of the *veil* can also be achieved on the basis that the *Muslim female subject* appears with no hair. As mentioned earlier, Chapter 2 in Kiarostami's *10* presents an interesting case regarding the transference of the *veil*, where the passenger's shaved head is depicted after she removes her *veil*. Given that the representation of the shaved head on screen is permissible, the codes of modesty that are here maintained in relation to the *Muslim female subject* can be deemed equivalent to those upheld by the *veil*, which in turn renders hair the transgressive element in question.<sup>68</sup> These examples thus demonstrate that the *Muslim female subject* can exist not-veiled, and that the *veil*'s transference can be realized either through costume substitution or the use of the shaved head, resulting in the material evasion of the *veil* on screen.

In our interview, Mohammed Hassan Khoshnevis explained that the MCIG controls representations of the *Muslim female subject* 'individually' under a category of assessment known as 'Control and Evaluation.' Both the extent to which the *Muslim female subject* is downveiled and the employment of the shaved head are assessed under this category and then approved by the MCIG as it sees fit, for there are no official or specific regulations concerning downveiling and shaved heads with regards to the *Muslim female subject* on screen.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, the employment of the shaved head became seen as a permissible means for directors to create a more realistic representation of the *Muslim female subject*, whenever it was deemed that the *veil* would obstruct the realism of the *mise-en-scène*.<sup>70</sup>



This latter contention is manifest in Mariam Shahriar's directorial debut *Daughters of the Sun* (2000), which explores in detail the relationship between the *Muslim female subject*, hair and the *veil*. Set among rural villages in Iran, the narrative explores the story of the protagonist, Aman, who disguises herself as a man and leaves her family for an austere life in another village where s/he works as a carpet weaver.



Figure 4.9: *Daughters of the Sun* (2000)

The opening sequence of the film is comprised of six shots that depict the protagonist's gender transformation (refer to Figure 4.9). The first reveals the protagonist in medium close-up in the foreground, on the left-hand side of the frame, with three seated girls in the background, on the right-hand side of the frame (DS.1). There follows a shot of shorn locks of hair falling onto the ground, after which the title of the film is introduced, therein isolating the transgressive element concerning modesty regulations relating to the *Muslim female subject* (DS.2). The sequence



continues with a long shot in which a man shaves Aman's hair, with five girls now visible in the backdrop on the right-hand side of the frame (DS.3). The fourth shot reveals an older woman and a young woman on the roof (DS.4), followed by a close-up shot of the protagonist with a shaved head, who slowly looks at the camera (DS.5). The sequence ends with a close-up image of the protagonist as she leaves her family, who are shown in the backdrop of the shot (DS.6).

The first shot foregrounds the complex interplay between the elements *veil*, hair and the *Muslim female subject*, where in an extreme case of *downveiling* the protagonist's long black hair is clearly made visible as it falls against her chest and out of the frame, reinforcing its presence. The conspicuous *downveiling* of her attire is heightened within the *mise-en-scène* by its juxtaposition with the girls in the backdrop, who appear *upveiled*. In the next shot, which presents the protagonist's hair falling onto the ground, hair is divorced from the *Muslim female subject* (DS.2). In thus centralizing the concept of *veiling* through the aesthetic contrast of down- and *upveiling* within the frame and the representation of hair in isolation, the opening two shots visually introduce the relationship between the *veil* and hair.

In the long shot that follows, in which we see the protagonist's hair being shaved by a man, she wears a skirt and her *veil* is on her shoulder. The *veil* continues to be referenced within the frame through the presence of the girls in the backdrop (DS.3). Whilst shots DS.1 and DS.2 examine the relationship between *veil* and hair, DS.1 and DS.3, on the other hand, explore the relationship between hair and the *Muslim female subject*, since hair is visually dominant in DS.1 and can barely be seen in



DS.3, further reinforced when hair is shown in isolation in the shot positioned between them (DS.2). Shot DS.4 reveals two women on the rooftop of a house who appear *upveiled*. The subsequent shot presents a close-up of the protagonist with a shaved head and the *veil* resting on her shoulder, whilst the backdrop within the frame reveals an image of a man who sits behind her (DS.5).

The background references within the frame not only stand in contrast to the protagonist's attire but, moreover, contribute to the gender transformation that takes place within the sequence. In the intermediary shot (DS.3), the *mise-en-scène* reflects this transition through the way in which the backdrop is gendered: female in DS.1, both in DS.3, mirroring the protagonist's androgynous state, male in DS.5. Significantly, despite the masculine backdrop in DS.5, the *veil* continues to be present. The shots nevertheless illustrate the progress of the protagonist's gender transformation, with its completion evident in the final shot of the sequence in which both her hair and *veil* are absent from the frame (DS.6).

As discussed in my introduction, the Derridean supplement incorporates two meanings: as Culler explains, it is at once 'an inessential extra, added to something complete in itself,' and something added 'to compensate for a lack in what was supposed to be complete in itself.'<sup>71</sup> Presenting the *veil*'s transference through the use of the shaved head and costume substitution can be understood in terms of supplementarity, for in the examples examined thus far, the transference of the *veil* is achieved through a direct costume substitution or replacement and/or is necessitated by censorship regulations and the requirements of the filmic *mise-en-scène*. In other words, whilst maintaining modesty through costume substitution



suggests merely a replacement of the function of the *veil* (something complete in itself), the transference of the *veil* in the interests of realism provides the supplementarity, which compensates for a deficiency in the symbolism of the *veil* (to compensate for a lack). In *Daughters of the Sun*, the *veil*, or rather its symbolism, constitutes a normative citation that would prevent the gender transformation from taking place and hence obstruct both the narrative and the realism of the *mise-en-scène*. Culler further explains that the Derridian supplement is presented in both meanings as 'exterior, foreign to the "essential" nature of that to which it is added or in which it is substituted.'<sup>72</sup> Both costume substitution and the use of the shaved head – the *veil*-as-supplement – are posited as exterior to the *veil*, most significantly in the way in which the symbolism of the *veil* is evaded in these constructions, which renders the substitute 'foreign' to the 'essential' nature of the material *veil* itself.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler examines how the performativity of gender destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire:

If the body is not a 'being,' but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, then what language is left for understanding this corporeal enactment, gender, that constitutes its 'interior' signification on its surface? ... I suggest that gendered bodies are so many 'styles of the flesh.' These styles are never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities. Consider gender, for instance, as *a corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning.<sup>73</sup>



If we were to consider the opening sequence of *Daughters of the Sun* in light of Butler's argument, the shaved head embodies a '*corporeal style*' and a performative act. The *veil*, which stands as a forcible citation of a norm, is evaded through the shaved head, which articulates the protagonist's gender throughout the narrative, 'constitut[ing] its interior signification on its surface.' Central to Butler's thesis is the contention that gendered identities are discursively constituted within 'a highly rigid regulatory frame,' where the subject is 'done' by gender, that is to say, it is not an action by 'a volitional agent' but rather an effect of discourse.<sup>74</sup> Thus, her assertion that gendered bodies are 'styles of the flesh' that are limited and conditioned can here illuminate my discussion on the *Muslim female subject*, whose gendered body has a 'history' (the *veil* and Islamic codes of modesty) that both limits and conditions the possibilities of its gendered enactments. In this context, the shaved head constitutes 'a contingent construction of meaning,' with contingency, in this instance, appertaining to the regulations of modesty. Whilst Butler's discussion is particularly illustrative with regards to *Daughters of the Sun*, namely in the way in which this transference of the *veil* constitutes a gendered enactment, it could nonetheless be argued that the *veil-as-supplement* in itself embodies 'a contingent construction of meaning,' principally in the way in which it stands in contingent relation to the conditions and limits of the codes of modesty.

In her discussion on gender parody, Butler further argues that 'parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essential gender identities':



Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, this process can be identified in the transference of the *veil*, which, though regulated by Islamic patriarchal discourse and the institutionalization of modesty, can nonetheless be seen as an act which denaturalizes this hegemonic order. The *veil-as-supplement*, therefore, deprives the hegemonic order 'of the claim to naturalized and essential gender identities,' for both the material *veil* and the *veil's* symbolism, signifiers of a norm, are evaded through parodic recontextualization.

In as far as the institutionalization of modesty is concerned, Naficy's study on the development of women's presence on screen can be extended in light of my argument above. Whilst his analysis ends with a phase of film-making that marks the growing importance of women both on and off screen, and their appearance in leading roles and no longer merely in long shot, it could be argued that representations of downveiling can also be seen as marking yet another distinction in the representation of the *veil* and the *Muslim female subject*. To thus reference the symbolism of the *veil* within the frame, whilst it no longer functions to uphold codes of modesty, presents a significant development concerning the representation of the *Muslim female subject*, which further informs Naficy's chart. Moreover, to consider rules relating specifically to Iranian women on screen alongside the insistence on institutionalized forms of dress by state-run television stations is to reveal a considerable discrepancy between censorship regulations concerning women and the prevailing attitude of the state. Finally, regarding the transference of the *veil*, I



extend Naficy's analysis to identify a fourth phase, namely the *veil*-as-supplement, which provides a platform for the material evasion of the *veil*. With the *veil* detached from the *Muslim female subject*, a hitherto inextricable requirement of her appearance on screen, I argue that this phase can be seen as one which denaturalizes the *veil* in representation and mobilizes the institutionalization of modesty in Iranian cinema.

### **The Semiotic Mutability of the *Veil* and the *Muslim Female Body* as Prenarrated Space**

In *Islam and Feminisms*, Haleh Afshar reports a case in 1994 where Iranian urban middle-class women challenged the state's insistence on all-encompassing forms of *veiling* by an increasing effort to substitute the *chador* with other forms of modest dress.<sup>76</sup> At this time, women who did not comply with the state's dictates on dress were increasingly liable to be punished.<sup>77</sup> Homa Darabi, a Professor at Tehran's National University, was one who protested against such constraints. Afshar writes,

On 21 February 1994, Homa Darabi ... tore off her *hijab* [*sic*] in a public thoroughfare near Tajrish Square in the Shemiran suburb of Tehran. Darabi passionately called for liberty and condemned oppression crying 'Down with tyranny, long live freedom, long live Iran!' She then poured petrol over herself and set herself alight ... In December 1991 she had been dismissed from her Chair for 'non-adherence to Islamic dress code, *hijab* [*sic*]' and although the decision was overturned by the Employment and Grievance Tribunal in May 1993, the University refused to reinstate her.<sup>78</sup>

Afshar explains that Darabi's public self-immolation generated considerable popular support, with an estimated 10,000 people attending her memorial service.<sup>79</sup> This, she



writes, led Islamists and government supporters to contest severe forms of dress codes.<sup>80</sup> In 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak gives an account of Bhuvanesari Bhaduri's suicide and imparts it as a case of subaltern (re)writing in that its message can only be understood retrospectively.<sup>81</sup> The fact that Bhaduri committed suicide during her menstruation represents what Spivak deems 'a displacing gesture,' since she knew that her death would otherwise be construed as a case of illicit pregnancy.<sup>82</sup> Remarking how Bhaduri's suicide was nevertheless widely misinterpreted, Spivak avers that, 'The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read.'<sup>83</sup> Whilst Darabi's message can be read, in that it initiated political debate on Islamic dress codes, her resort to suicide nonetheless represents a silent gesture on her part; with her objections not heard and her dismissal ignored, her death can thus be deemed a sign of the voiceless subject.

My account of Darabi's suicide serves to distinguish between a particular case in which the status of the *Muslim female subject* is silent, and the supposition that the *Muslim female subject* is inherently silent. It could be argued that the assumption that the *Muslim female subject* is 'subaltern' is rooted in a reading of the *veil* as a signifier of silence.<sup>84</sup> I shall proceed to examine this assumption by exploring contemporary visual practices with reference to Iran. A paradigmatic example of this is offered in the aforementioned *My Sister Guard Your Veil; My Brother Guard Your Eyes: Uncensored Iranian Voices*, which editor Lila Azam Zangeneh claims 'strives to open a series of vibrant perspectives on concealed Iranian realms.'<sup>85</sup> This stated intention to un-censor voices and open 'concealed' realms, coupled with the use of 'guarding' in relation to the *veil* and eyes in the title, propagates the familiar



trope of the *veil* as signifying censorship. My following discussion shall extend this observation within the context of the institutionalization of Islamic censorship, where I locate a consistent visual and metaphoric referencing of the *veil* as the embodiment of censorship and silence, culminating in an analysis of Chapter 2 of Kiarostami's *10*. I then proceed to demonstrate how this mode of representation is problematical in that it upholds the *Muslim female subject* as the (universal) censored and/or silenced subject.

In Neshat's *Unveiling* and *Women of Allah*, two series of black and white photographs produced after her return to Iran, the *chador* is consistently referred to throughout, with the photographer herself wearing it in some instances (Figure 4.10). The photographs are inscribed with excerpts from the writings of Iranian poet Fourough Farukhzad in Persian calligraphy in black ink. One entitled *Faceless* (1994) shows the artist in a black *chador* with calligraphy adorning the visible elements of her arm and face; pointing a gun towards the viewer, she gazes directly at the camera. The *Women of Allah* series refers to the theme of Islamic martyrdom and women's resistance movements in Iran, such that both the gun and the *chador* are rendered aesthetic tropes.<sup>86</sup> The *chador* further serves to articulate the feminine and hence commemorates the place of women's resistance movements within Iran's social and political history.

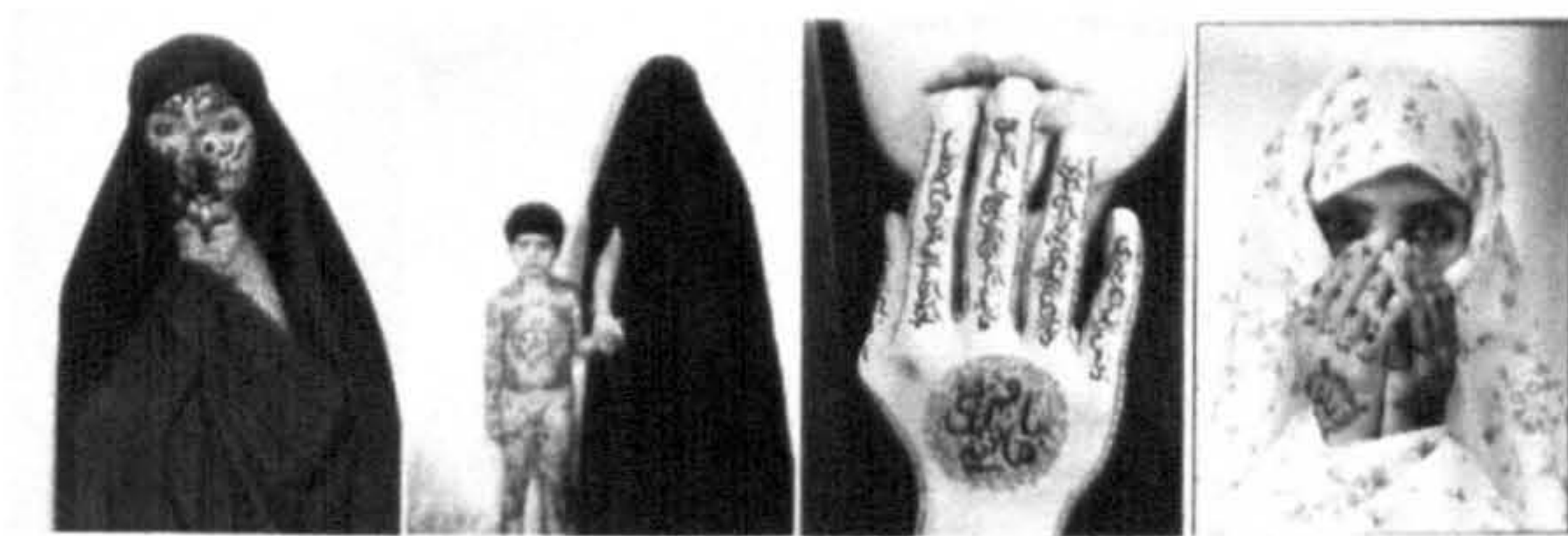


Figure 4.10: *Faceless* (1994); *Untitled* (1996); *Untitled* (1996); *Identified* (1995)



*Untitled* (1996) depicts a woman wearing a black *chador* with one arm visible with which she holds the hand of a naked boy, his body covered in Persian calligraphy. Two further images, *Untitled* (1996) and *Identified* (1995) are similar in the way that the woman in each holds her hand, which is inscribed with calligraphy, against her mouth. In the catalogue for the artist's solo exhibition at Paris' Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Héléna Bastais describes Neshat's photographic series as follows:

The silence of these pictures, which relates to how difficult it is for Middle Eastern women to express themselves in public, is relieved not only by the amazing intensity of their gaze – the mirror of their soul, and the only other way they can communicate – but also by the texts and poems by Iranian women that the author calligraphs directly onto the photographic print ... But again we should perhaps look twice at this, as the artist uses other devices to procure a different kind of space and a different kind of freedom for her protagonists: the all-powerful freedom of thought ... A hand raised to a woman's lips signifies imposed silence, but the calligraphy that covers the image indicates that verbal expression can be set free by writing.<sup>87</sup>

The perception that the *Muslim female subject* is inherently silent is notably manifest in Bastais' reading of Neshat's work, where she relates the 'silence' of the images to the supposition that Middle Eastern women find it difficult to express themselves publicly. Whilst Bastais candidly outlines the silence of the *Muslim female subject* in her celebration of Neshat's work, Farzaneh Milani, who proffers a similar reading, is less explicit:



In her photographic series, Neshat captures the non-violent, non-militaristic, and above all, aesthetic nature of Iranian women's resistance. Concentrating on the complex textual relations between body and veil, she transcribes Persian calligraphic script, often exquisitely rebellious poetry by pioneering women poets, on the exposed faces, hands, and feet in her photographs. Giving voice to the body and body to the voice, she memorialized Iranian women's defiance at the same time as she launched her own artistic career.<sup>88</sup>

It could be found troubling that Bastais' and Milani's observations locate the salvation of the *Muslim female subject* in the artist's interventions. Significantly, however, in the first image described above, Neshat's aesthetic discourse employs the *chador* to expunge the *Muslim female subject* from the image to the extent that only her arm is visible, exaggerating the naked/covered opposition of the *chador* and the naked boy. The arm visible beneath the *chador* is isolated and centralized within the image. The boy's naked body, however, is inscribed with an intricate design which echoes the embroidered curtain in the backdrop. Alongside the naked/covered juxtaposition, this effect not only highlights the centralization of the arm but furthermore emphasizes the manner in which the *chador* is constructed as an entity which envelopes the *Muslim female subject*.

In *Untitled* and *Identified* the *Muslim female subject* is constructed as silent by the way she holds her hand against her mouth. In so rendering her as a voiceless subject, and the ink interjection the only site of expression, both Neshat's attempted recuperation of voice and Bastais' and Milani's enthusiastic search for freedom in the images illustrate Spivak's contention that the resurrection of the subaltern's voice and agency is a form of 'epistemic violence' conflated with the imperialist



notion of subject-constitution.<sup>89</sup> Spivak argues that as well as running the risk that the effects of imperial domination are ignored, the attempt to recover the voice and agency of the 'subaltern' is impossible and that attempts to achieve it only further enforce her silence.<sup>90</sup>

I would argue that this contention is demonstrated in Neshat's aesthetic discourse, for whilst Bastais and Milani interpret the artist's calligraphic interjections as a device which procures freedom by bestowing voice, the use of ink on the face of the *Muslim female subject* in *Faceless* has a contrary effect, undermining the attempt to illustrate defiance with the direct gaze and the gun pointing at the camera. Milani frames the use of Persian calligraphy as restorative, with the text written by pioneering women poets situating this intervention as defiant and rebellious. Though this reading interprets Neshat's transcription of poetry as 'giving voice,' the artist's intervention in *Faceless* maintains the silence of the *Muslim female subject*, shedding light on the rendition of the body as surface throughout the series; it becomes instead an act which marks and codes the body as a result of Neshat's social empowerment as artist. It is therefore crucial to question Bastais' contention regarding an imposed silence, for the subjects are here *staged* as silent, with staging constituting yet another element of the artist's devices. Thus, the attempt to recuperate voice for a silent subject ensures that '[she] will be as mute as ever.'<sup>91</sup>

Within recent Iranian artistic projects, the *veil* has been frequently employed as a trope to explore and critique the institutionalization of censorship within the context of Islam. An ongoing work in progress entitled *Freedom is Boring, Censorship is*



*Fun* (2002-6) (Figure 4.11) by the Iranian artists Farhad Moshiri and Shirin Aliabadi presents a series of images from magazines that have been censored by the MCIG or booksellers alongside others that were censored by the artists themselves, which refer to 'the ongoing yet confusing battle between the censors and western imagery.'<sup>92</sup> Moshiri and Aliabadi explain that their intention in 'showing censorship material' is not a case of 'Iran bashing,' that is to say that 'there is major censorship in Iran and artists are suffering because of it,' but rather to illustrate,

that the censors were developing new creative ways to cover images over time. At first they recklessly crossed out images with a thick black marker and gradually they changed style and used metallic and coloured stickers. Now we are seeing Photoshop used as a playful tool to what we call pointalize, decapitate or digitalize 'questionable' areas of the body. Basically censors were having fun! Censorship was turning into a tradition and suddenly artistry was used to create new methods of censorship.<sup>93</sup>

This statement recalls Naficy's contention with regards to the evolution of the *Muslim female subject* and censorship on screen. Most significant, he explains, is the way in which the 'offending parts were blackened out directly in the frames with markers.'<sup>94</sup> However, whilst Naficy claims that the censorship regulations of Iran's MCIG necessitated that directors adopt a poetic language through the use of substitutes and various stylistic techniques, the project *Freedom is Boring, Censorship is Fun* rather presents the evolution of a sophisticated language of censorship by the censors themselves (Figure 4.11).





Figure 4.11: *Mannequin Censor by Black Marker* (2002); *Censorship by Dentelle* (2002); *Beautiful Bride Censor by Pointalism* (2002); *Censorship by Decapitation* (2003)

The evolution in the censors' 'artistry' with reference to the *Muslim female subject* is evinced in images FC.1-4. The relationship between *Mannequin Censor by Black Marker* (FC.1) and *Censorship by Dentelle* (FC.2) clearly illustrates a transformation in the language of censorship from the use of the black marker, where 'dress' (dentelle) is rendered a means of censoring the *Muslim female subject*. Moreover, the term 'dentelle' in the title recalls the way in which costume substitution is used as a form of censorship in the cinematic representations of the *Muslim female subject* discussed previously in this chapter. *Beautiful Bride Censor by Pointalism* (FC.3) and *Censorship by Decapitation* (FC.4), on the other hand, engage with the evasion of the *veil* without costume substitution and can, in this respect, be likened to references to the shaved head, which similarly negate the need to inscribe dress within the frame. In these images, however, unlike references to the shaved head



where the *Muslim female subject* is represented and the *veil* is not, the absence of the *veil* is legitimized through the complete extrapolation of the head.

Another image in the series entitled *Censorship Barbie* (FC.5) reveals the way in which the *chador* is used as a means of censoring the *Muslim female subject*, continuing the evolution evinced from *Mannequin Censor* by *Black Marker* to *Censorship* by *Dentelle*, where dress is employed as a means of censorship. However, whilst *Censorship* by *Dentelle* presents dress manifested in the form ‘dentelle,’ in *Censorship Barbie* the black *chador* comments on the evolution of the language of censorship through playful allusions to the way in which censors have ‘recklessly crossed out images with a thick black marker,’ as illustrated in *Mannequin Censor* by *Black Marker*. This aesthetic culminates in the series in an image entitled *Why I Love My Little Black Dress* (FC.6) in which ‘the black dress,’ ‘the black *chador*’ and ‘the black marker’ are fused with one another, thereby extending the relationship between the *Muslim female subject* and the colour black to connote the theme of censorship with reference to Islam.



Figure 4.12 *Censorship Barbie* (2003); *Why I Love My Little Black Dress* (2002)

This aesthetic, namely the use of the black marker to ‘veil’ the *Muslim female subject*, is similarly employed in the publication *Issue 1* (2002) by the Swiss/Iranian



art collective 'Shahrzad,' which presents a series of images and written passages that are deliberately 'censored' through design (refer to Figure 4.13). *Issue 1* appropriates the relationship between the black marker and the *Muslim female subject* in a detailed translation of this aesthetic. Throughout the publication, passages of text are interrupted by the use of a black marker to obscure certain words (S.1). This aesthetic is translated from text to image when one such page is juxtaposed with a reproduction of Matisse's *Standing Nude c.1908* that is entirely covered by black marker (S.2). The following image uses the black marker to suggest the silhouette of a woman who appears *veiled* (S.3). The progression thus far reveals how the black marker is transformed from a means of censoring the image into a means of representing the image, namely that of the *Muslim female subject*.

A similar effect is witnessed in the publication in a photograph of a woman with the outline of a *veil* marked around her face (S.4). In this instance the relationship between the black marker and the *Muslim female subject* renders the *veil* an element that is imposed on her representation through the interruption of the image by design. Moreover, the *Muslim female subject* in S.3 appears faceless, thus rendering the *veil* the sole site of signification, an effect further extended in S.4 where the use of the black marker renders the 'imposed' *veil* the most dominant element within the image. The *veil* becomes irrefutably the primary site of signification, and as an enforced imposition simultaneously articulates the *Muslim female subject*.





Figure 4.13: *Issue 1* (2002)

In the artistic projects described above, the use of the black marker reveals the way in which the interjection of an ‘imposed’ *veil* is used as a metaphor for censorship and an ‘imposed “silence.”’ In both projects the theme of censorship is articulated not only through the *veil*/marker aesthetic but also in the *Muslim female subject* herself, since she is rendered a consistent and central element within the examination and critique of Islamic censorship with reference to Islam. This is further reinforced in *Issue 1* by the image repeated on the inside front and back covers of loose strands of hair in isolation (S.5), which foreground the fact that the transgressive element in question throughout the publication is that which relates to the *Muslim female subject*. With the textual passages not directly engaging with the *Muslim female subject* and her relationship to censorship, she is here rendered a metaphor for the universal censored subject.



The project *Freedom is Boring, Censorship is Fun* similarly focuses on the *Muslim female subject* as the object of censorship, a fact not only manifested in the evolution of the censors' 'artistry,' charted with reference to the *Muslim female subject*, but also evinced in the manner in which she is represented in Aliabadi's *Girls in Cars* (Figure 4.14), part of the same project. In a series of four photographs a group of girls are shown downveiled as they drive their cars at night. The artwork attempts to dispel the notion that the *veil* is an impediment to having fun, albeit manifested through references to downveiling. However, the *Muslim female subject* herself is aligned with the concept of censorship through conjunction with the project's subversive title, *Censorship is Fun*, as demonstrated by the way in which the girls are clearly enjoying themselves. The *veil* is thus inscribed with the positive association of fun whilst the *Muslim female subject* embodies the subject of censorship itself.



Figure 4.14: *Girls in Cars* (2003)



The rendition of the *Muslim female subject* as a metaphor for the censored subject in these representations is comparable to Neshat's *Identified* and *Untitled*, where women holding their hands against their mouths are *staged* as silent subjects. Furthermore, the way in which the black *chador* in Neshat's *Untitled* expunges the *Muslim female subject* from the image is akin to the *veil*/marker aesthetic, which simultaneously erases and articulates the *Muslim female subject* through design. In this way the signifier of silence/censorship becomes the *means* through which the *Muslim female subject* is staged and represented, and at the same time (dis)articulated, censored and silenced. However, whilst Neshat's transcription of poetry has been interpreted as a restorative intervention that gives voice, and thus constitutes an opposing effect to that of the *veil*/marker aesthetic, which exclusively engages with silence, in essence the outcome is analogous: the transcription of poetry in *Faceless* obscures the woman's face, literally rendering her faceless, such that Neshat's aesthetic discourse further maintains her silence. I shall return to the problematics of thus employing the *veil* as a trope for censorship later in this chapter. The following discussion, however, pays particular attention to Chapter 2 of Kiarostami's *10* to demonstrate how his screen discourse operates within and contributes to the institutionalization of modesty.

In 'Where are Kiarostami's Women?' Negar Mottahadeh contends that *10* pays 'significant attention to the ways in which the demands placed on the representation of women in the Iranian context affect the formal components of representation in cinema.'<sup>95</sup> She explains that the way Kiarostami 'radically absents himself ... from the set' refers to the 'impossibilities of hetero-social relations between female actors



and their male director'; for, since women were 'edited out of the screen in the era of post-revolutionary modesty,' representing them as 'central characters, in this logic, means absenting the male director altogether.'<sup>96</sup> She contends that watching Kiarostami's films 'chronologically' presents the dialect of his filmic language as 'rooted in the association of the filmic apparatus with an embodied modesty and an averted gaze.'<sup>97</sup> She further argues that this is exemplified in the way in which the camera is linked with 'the photographer's veiled body,' submitting itself to 'the claustrophobic environment she has long tried to escape.'<sup>98</sup>

Interestingly, Mottahadeh's analysis recalls Naficy's argument, discussed in Chapter Two, regarding the way in which the *veil* is inscribed as 'a panoptic technology' in Makhmalbaf's *The Apple*. Mottahadeh takes as her point of departure, as does Naficy, the *veil* as a signifier of imprisonment: 'the claustrophobic environment she has long tried to escape.' In this instance, however, unlike Naficy, who ignored the way in which the body functions within the technologies of power, Mottahadeh acknowledges the body as a discursive site in her correlation between the *Muslim female body* and the filmic apparatus, with *veiling* metaphorically posited as a practice that regulates and disciplines the body. Given, as Mottahadeh explains, that Kiarostami's screen discourse engages with the institutionalization of modesty and its governance of the *Muslim female subject* in Iranian cinema, his filmic *mise-en-scène* posits the *Muslim female body* as a discursive effect of the hegemonic order of Islamic patriarchy. The women's stationary bodies in the seats of the car come to represent the body that is inscribed, marked and invested in accordance with *veiling* as a form of power and domination.



In her discussion, however, Mottahedeh posits power as emanating from the filmic *mise-en-scène* – ‘the claustrophic environment she had longed tried to escape’ – which herein stands as a metaphor for the *veil* and the institutionalization of modesty. With the director absented from the set, Mottahedeh interprets the lens as embodying ‘an averted gaze,’ where his camera, also static and subjugated to the *mise-en-scène*, embodies the status of the *Muslim female body*, or rather in her words, ‘the photographer’s veiled body.’ Her argument, therefore, delivers an analogy between the *mise-en-scène* and the *veil*, and the camera and the *Muslim female body*.

Counter to her argument, I view the fixed camera on the dashboard of the car as another form of subjection, primarily in the fact that techniques such as blackouts and shot-reverse-shots are resisted throughout the narrative, which posit the camera’s unrelieved attention as yet another element which invests and disciplines the *Muslim female body*. Furthermore, although the authorial male gaze is here absent, the audience is nonetheless situated within a field of visibility and thus, to reiterate Foucault’s contention, ‘He [*sic*] who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power.’<sup>99</sup> Following this, whilst Mottahedeh’s argument varies extensively from Naficy’s in that it acknowledges the *Muslim female body* as a discursive site and an effect of the technologies of power, in suggesting that Kiarostami’s camera embodies ‘an averted gaze,’ she likewise overlooks the techniques of power that operate within the field of visibility. Rather than embodying the status of the *Muslim female body*, I argue that



both Kiarostami's camera and *mise-en-scène* stand as metaphors for the *veil*, which incarcerate and subjugate the *Muslim female body* as an effect of Islamic patriarchal discourse.

Kiarostami's metaphoric rendition of the *veil* varies significantly from the examples discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, most clearly in the way in which the body is not extrapolated from discourse but rather is central to this manifestation. It thus stands as an exception to the recurrent translations of the *veil* on screen, which are instead concerned with its ideological dimensions and the spatial renditions of gendered segregation and seclusion. Kiarostami's representation of the *Muslim female body* as a discursive site of *veiling* brings to mind the scene from Makhmalbaf's *Kandahar*, discussed in Chapter Two, which presents the *unveiled* body as a discursive site by positioning the camera within the *burqu'* to expose the women's faces. A correlation between the two films can therefore be drawn in that, in both, the *Muslim female subject* occupies an interior – 'inside' the *burqu'* and inside the car – which once again confirms the discursive structure through which the *Muslim female body* has predominantly become known, as Yeğenoğlu writes, 'as the interior that needs to be protected or penetrated.'<sup>100</sup> Whilst the above account demonstrates how Kiarostami's metaphoric renditions of the *veil* constitute the *Muslim female body* through *veiling*, my ensuing argument shall engage with the way in which it is posited as a discursive site in the director's transference of the *veil* in Chapter 2 of his narrative.



The presentation of the shaved head in *10* occurs at the end of Chapter 2 (refer to Figure 4.15). The passenger loosens her *veil* (T.11) before looking at herself in the mirror with her hairline now visible (T.12). At this point the driver, noticing the passenger's shaved hairline, asks her if she has had her hair cut, to which the passenger turns to answer and further makes apparent the contours of her shaved head (T.13). She holds on to her *veil* as she continues to look at the driver while they speak (T.14-5). The scene continues as the passenger crosses her arms and tilts her head down to present the contours of her shaved head from another angle (T.16). She removes her *veil* (T.17) and shows the driver her shaved head (T.18). The characters speak as the passenger, with her *veil* around her neck, simultaneously laughs and cries (T.19-20). The scene continues as the passenger crosses her arms and tilts her head down to present the contours of her shaved head from another angle (T.16). She removes her *veil* (T.17) and shows the driver her shaved head (T.18). The characters speak as the passenger, with her *veil* around her neck, simultaneously laughs and cries (T.19-20).

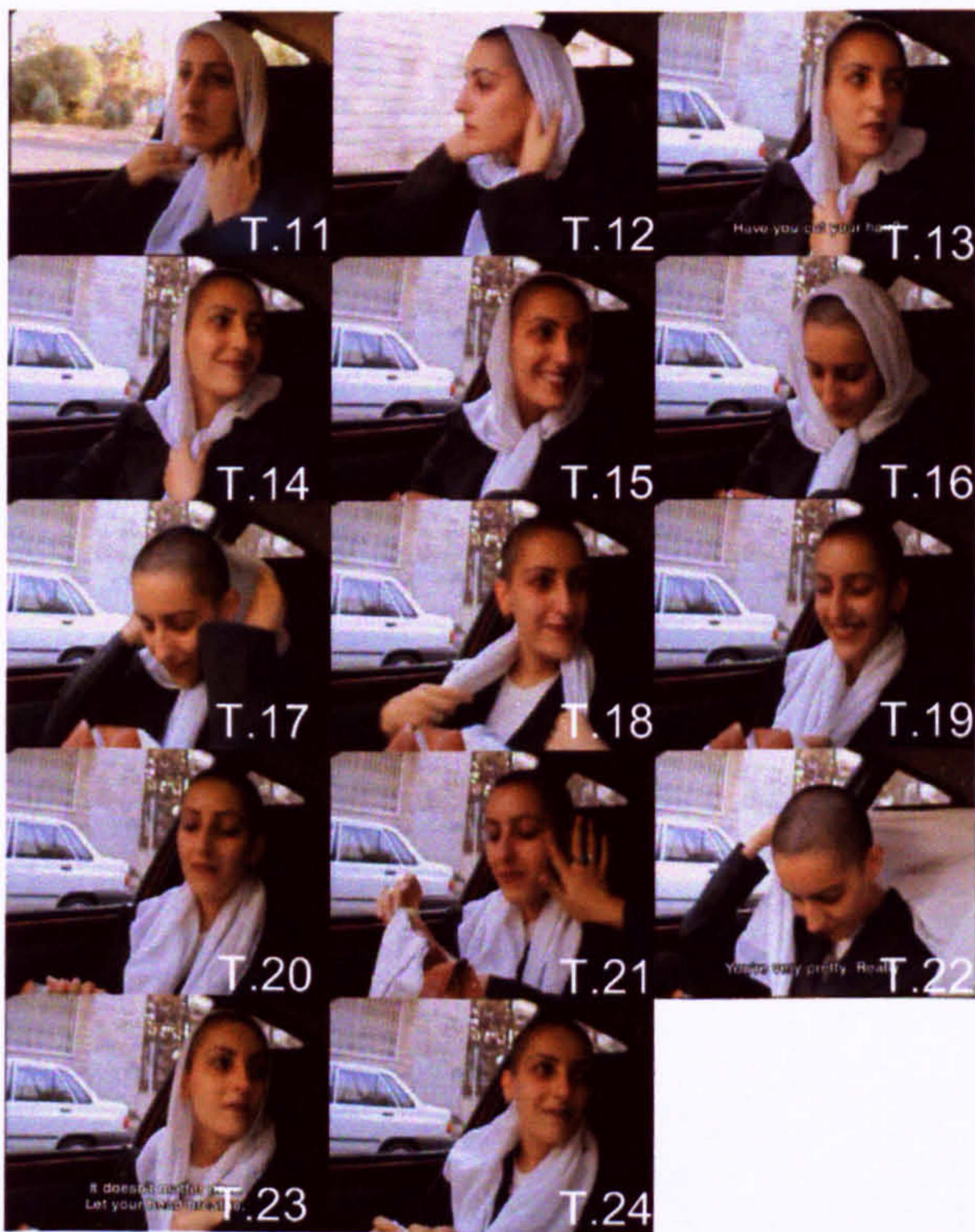


Figure 4.15: *10* (2002)



In the scenario here described, Kiarostami employs varying narrative devices to prolong the moment before the passenger removes her *veil*, beginning with the way in which she first loosens it (T.11) to reveal her hairline (T.12). This is then exaggerated as she makes apparent the contours of her head (T.13). Moreover, the characters are silent when the passenger first loosens her *veil*, thus rendering the hairline the focal point of the shot. After the driver asks the passenger if she has had her hair cut, the moment is yet further drawn out by the manner in which she first holds on to her *veil*, and in the subsequent moments as she crosses her arms and tilts her head with the contours of her shaved head now made clearly visible (T.15). The viewer is hereby led to anticipate the removal of the *veil* but the process is deferred, with the delay reinforced most poignantly in T.16 when the act is preceded by a long and silent pause.

The driver's hand appears within the frame to wipe away the passenger's tears (T.21) (refer to Figure 4.15). This action is repeated twice in this scene, which draws attention to the passenger's face. This is emphasized by yet another interruption, that is, the driver's voice as they continue to speak to each other, for the camera resists a shot-reverse-shot sequence, remaining fixed on the passenger. The passenger claims that her *veil* has slipped as she puts it back on (T.22), at which point she turns to look at the driver whilst holding on to it (T.23). The driver states, 'it doesn't matter now, let your head breathe.' The passenger again removes her *veil* to reveal her shaved head and looks at the driver, and the scene ends (T.24).



With Iran's MCIG permitting representations of the shaved head as a viable substitute in contexts where the *veil* would potentially obstruct the realism of the *mise-en-scène*, how are we to interpret the evasion of the *veil* and the representation of the shaved head in Chapter 2 of the film? With this transference not necessitated by the diegesis, does Kiarostami exercise the mobility of the *veil* merely because he can?

In her examination of the role and 'privileging of vision' in colonialist thought, Yeğenoğlu argues that 'vision, with its accompanying imagery of the unveiling of truth, is figured as the key instrument of knowledge.'<sup>101</sup> She identifies what she terms the 'dialectic of visuality' as demonstrated in the Enlightenment paradigm as being similarly evident in the nineteenth century realist tradition.<sup>102</sup> Referring to Peter Brook's *Body Work*, which 'demonstrates the inextricable link between the scopophilic and epistemophilic projects, that is, between the desire to see and the erotic investment in knowing,' she explains how Brook establishes a connection between seeing, possessing and knowing that conflates the desire for knowledge and the desire for mastery.<sup>103</sup> Yeğenoğlu argues,

The convergence of the erotic investment in seeing and the epistemic principles of realist vision has manifested itself most notably in the narratives of the body ... The uncovering of truth thus becomes a process of unveiling, and revelation, and a process of stripping the obstacle that prevents its immediate comprehension.<sup>104</sup>

She further explains how, according to Barthes, the realist narrative was 'predicated upon the hope of knowing the end of the story ... what allows the reader to experience pleasure is not simply the point of arrival or what is finally to be unveiled



but the promise of an eventual unveiling of the truth.'<sup>105</sup> For Barthes, she adds, 'the desire to know the end of the story coalesces with the hope of seeing the genitals. Hence a fetishistic attention on articles of clothing, accessories as objects of fascination that need eventually to be pulled down.'<sup>106</sup> She refers once again to Brook, whose reading of Flaubert's *Emma Bovary* exemplifies 'that the pursuit of truth implies an erotic pursuit of nudity, as nudity implies an act of exposing and laying bare the body that is considered to be the ultimate object of knowledge.'<sup>107</sup>

In *10*, it could be argued that the evasion of the *veil* is manifested not in the act of *unveiling* per se, but rather in 'the promise of an eventual unveiling' encoded in the moments prior to this act. The way in which the contours of the shaved head are made apparent from varying angles render the *veil* an object of fascination, where 'fetishistic attention' is drawn on to it by the way the passenger touches it as she prolongs this act. Significantly, the transference of the *veil* in *Daughters of the Sun* is positioned at the opening of the narrative; Kiarostami, by contrast, presents *unveiling* in the penultimate episode of the film, which thereby conflates 'the promise of an eventual unveiling' with 'a hope of knowing the end of the story.' The shaved head, in this context, implies nudity, with *unveiling* rendered an act of 'exposing and laying bare the body that is considered to be the ultimate object of knowledge.'

Barthes explains in *Mythologies* that in the tradition of striptease 'a whole series of coverings [are] placed upon the body of woman in proportion as she pretends to strip it bare'; the end of the striptease, he argues, 'is then ... to signify, through the shedding of an incongruous and artificial clothing, nakedness as a *natural* vesture of



woman, which amounts in the end to regaining a perfectly chaste state of the flesh.'<sup>108</sup> Barthes writes,

Exoticism is the first of these barriers, for it is always of a petrified kind which transports the body into the world of legend or romance: a Chinese woman equipped with an opium pipe (the indispensable symbol of 'Sininess'), an undulating vamp with a gigantic cigarette-holder, a Venetian decor complete with gondola, a dress with panniers and a singer of serenades: all aim at establishing the woman *right from the start* as an object in disguise.<sup>109</sup>

In Chapter 2 of *10*, through 'the promise of an eventual unveiling,' the rendition of the *veil* can be likened to the series of coverings described by Barthes, 'placed on the body of woman as she *pretends* to strip it bare.' With 'fetishistic attention' drawn to the *veil* through the employment of narrative devices, exoticism is engendered and the *veil*, by implication, positioned as a barrier to the *Muslim female body*. Kiarostami thus establishes the passenger '*right from the start* as an object in disguise.' The centralization of the dialectical relationship between *veiling* and revealing in this scenario, most apparent in the frame which presents the *Muslim female subject* partially *veiled*, before her complete exposure, recalls the *unveiling* sequence in Pat McGreal's *Veils*, discussed in Chapter One. The *veiling/revealing* dialectic is strongly reinforced in the mediatory stage of this process, where the woman's face and cleavage are prominently revealed whilst the *veil* – 'positioned as a barrier' – continues to be referenced alongside her exposed flesh.

The relationship between an anticipated *unveiling* and 'the hope of knowing the end of the story' is evident in both instances. In *Veils*, this is exemplified in the male



hand which appears isolated within the frame as it reaches towards the woman, before the observation that, 'She was a remarkably beautiful creature.'<sup>110</sup> The 'promise of an eventual unveiling' in *10* is engendered through narrative devices and the driver's hand, which interrupts the shot and further delays the act. Kiarostami therefore draws on an archetypal representation of the *veil*'s mobility, namely in the way in which the process is prolonged through *unveiling*. The shaved head that is engendered through this paradigm is akin to the *unveiled* woman on stage, for both are positioned as the denouement of this process, with the resultant effect that they stand exposed, laid bare and rendered a 'spectacle' before the audience. Significantly, whilst the *veil* is evaded in this scene, the *Muslim female subject* nonetheless continues to be articulated through dress; *with* her *veil* referenced within the frame she stands alongside Barthes' 'Chinese woman equipped *with* an opium pipe' and 'the undulating vamp *with* a gigantic cigarette holder [emphases added].' It could thus be argued that in dissociating the *Muslim female body* from the *veil*, Kiarostami's employment of the paradigm of *unveiling* 'transports the [*Muslim female*] body into a world of legend or romance.'

Myra Macdonald's 'Muslim Women and the Veil' encapsulates in general terms the development of this particular 'legend' when she writes that,

Associations between unveiling and sexual fantasy were brought vividly to life in Western representations of the *harem* [*sic*], in a tradition stretching from the nineteenth-century paintings of Delacroix and Ingres through to twentieth-century advertising and film. The transformation of the biblical story of Salomé dancing for King Herod into the striptease 'dance of the seven veils' in theatrical and cinematic performances, from Oscar Wilde's



*Salomé* (1893) onwards, confirmed the centrality of the veil in constructions of the Oriental *femme fatale*.<sup>111</sup>

Macdonald further makes clear the epistemological connotations of *unveiling* within the context of the colonized body, referring to Bhabha's observation, that it 'is always simultaneously (if conflictually) inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power.'<sup>112</sup> In relation to *10*, however, Macdonald argues the following:

Despite the potential for stereotyping that such a cast suggests, the film avoids typecasting, and quietly challenges mainstream representations of Iranian women. Instead of *chador*-clad, black shrouded figures, silently and warily gliding through public spaces, common in Western representation, the women in this film retain their individuality.<sup>113</sup>

She continues,

In building its narration of female identities through dialogue, *Ten* differs from the other representations of Muslim women considered in the course of this article. More typically, in television and film narratives, the segregation of Muslim women ensures their isolation not just from men, but from each other. The possibility of female companionship offered by the seclusion of the *harem* [*sic*] is consequently denied.<sup>114</sup>

Crucially, in her article Macdonald makes apparent the problematics of the *unveiling* paradigm with reference to Orientalist constructions of the *Muslim female subject*. In her discussion of *10*, however, she makes no reference to Kiarostami's *unveiling* sequence and the way in which the reanimation of this paradigm, informed by the colonial narrative of the *veil*, in effect perpetuates the very tradition that 'confirmed



the centrality of the veil in constructions of the Oriental *femme fatale*.' Whilst her defence of *10* celebrates the way Kiarostami resists a monolithic representation of the practice of *veiling*, in her attempt to reveal how his aesthetic transcends uniform representations of the *veil*, Macdonald herself polarizes the representations of the *veil*. In using as her point of reference representations of '*chador-clad*' figures in opposition to women who 'retain their individuality,' her criticism of 'the potential for stereotyping' is in fact reiterated in her own writing, which upholds the assumption that the *chador* constitutes a mainstream representation of Iranian women.

In *10*, Kiarostami does present an alternative aesthetic to the representations of the *Muslim female subject* discussed in Chapter Two. Through his inscription of new *veiling* practices, ideologically opposed notions of femininity are rendered diegetically against the presence of the *chador* and the *maqna'ī*. Moreover, with the en-lightening process most significantly attributed to his main protagonist, style is not deemed incongruous to the *Muslim female subject*, as implied in the critics' descriptions of Akbari's appearance in their reviews of the film. In these instances, Kiarostami transcends rendering the *veil* the sole site of signification when representing the *Muslim female subject*, in contrast to Makhlouf in *At Five in the Afternoon*, where costume superfluity rendered the *Muslim female body* 'engulfed by dress.' Significantly, however, in Chapter 2 of *10*, the *Muslim female subject* who is disassociated from the *veil* nonetheless continues to be defined by dress, both through the act of *unveiling* itself and the fact that the *veil* is continually referenced



within the frame. The *Muslim female subject* who is seemingly no longer defined by the *veil* is instead defined by its absence.

Whilst Macdonald acknowledges, through reference to Bhabha, the way in which the colonized body is posited within an epistemological dialectic of power, desire and domination, her discussion fails to take into account how this perspective relates to the *unveiled Muslim female body* as presented by Kiarostami. Throughout the process of *unveiling*, the camera remains fixed on the passenger as she delays the act. Shot-reverse-shot techniques are resisted as the driver's voice and hand interrupt the shot, with the camera herein further fixating the passenger. Kiarostami here renders the *unveiled Muslim female body* as a discursive site, where the technologies of power operate within the field of visibility. The shaved head, rendered a spectacle before the audience, is subjected to the camera's unrelieved attention, which, alongside the filmic *mise-en-scène*, further locates the *Muslim female body* within a nexus of power, desire and domination. Whilst the *Muslim female body* stands throughout the narrative as a discursive site for Islamic patriarchy, it could be argued that the epistemological connotations inherent in the reanimation of the colonial narrative of the *veil* renders the *unveiled Muslim female body* an effect of colonial discourse and ideology. To this effect, Macdonald's contention that *10* resists the potential for stereotyping is notably undermined, most significantly since the *unveiling* sequence in Chapter 2 in essence presents the *Muslim female subject* as the stereotype *par excellence*, where the contentious fantasy of 'female companionship offered by the seclusion of the *harem* [*sic*]' is instead connotatively evoked.



In *10*, the opening of Chapter 2 introduces the concept of modesty and *veiling* practices through the characters' attire. It is then discussed halfway through the scene when the driver tells her passenger that her tight *veil* does not suit her. The passenger looks at herself in the mirror and the camera remains fixed on her until the end of the scene. After a few moments of silence, the passenger loosens her *veil* and reveals her hairline, at which point the driver interrupts and asks her whether she has cut her hair. She replies, 'Am I hideous?' The driver then asks her to reveal her new haircut. The camera remains fixed on the passenger as she removes her *veil* to reveal her shaved head. In a tone of surprise, the driver tells her that it suits her and asks her what she felt like after doing such a thing, to which the passenger replies, 'I felt great, I stopped crying.' She begins to cry now, however, and the driver's hand appears within the frame to wipe away her tears. The passenger then puts on her *veil* and says that her scarf has slipped. The driver implores her not to replace it and the passenger removes it once more.

In 'Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema,' Azadeh Farahmand argues in relation to what she regards as Kiarostami's 'political escapism' that his films:

bypass the most highly censorable themes, such as political or social criticism; as for the portrayal of women, he simply avoids the issue, by using only a few female characters ... The state's imposition of 'Islamic' dress codes and restrictions on women's screen appearance does, however, make the production of Iranian films with women on screen an extremely challenging task. To conform to these restrictions, besides wearing *hejab* [*sic*] women should not look attractive or appear in colourful clothes, nor should there be close-ups of their faces ... In his construction of female roles,



Kiarostami keeps conservatively in line with the religious belief that allocates a marginal position and a subordinate gender role to women.<sup>115</sup>

Significantly, Farahmand's criticism was made with regards to Kiarostami's cinema up until 1999, when he made *The Wind Will Carry Us*.<sup>116</sup> The 'restrictions' concerning the *Muslim female subject* on screen which she here describes refer to Naficy's 'third phase,' when censorship regulations, she explains, 'were loosened ... when some pro-reform manoeuvres took place within local cinematic productions,' and are therefore not applicable to the representation of the *Muslim female subject* in *10*.<sup>117</sup>

Taking the woman's question as the subject of this film, Kiarostami responds to such criticisms by making direct reference to 'attractive' women in 'colourful clothes' who appear in close-up throughout the narrative. Given that Kiarostami's 'political escapism' regarding the *Muslim female subject* was to a large extent dictated by the restrictions upon her cinematic representation, the most unfailing being 'the state's imposition of "Islamic" dress codes,' the evasion of the *veil* in Chapter 2 is thus rendered resistant to these very regulations. Moreover, as established, although Iran's MCIG permits representations of the shaved head as a viable substitute in contexts where the *veil* would potentially obstruct the realism of the *mise-en-scène*, crucially in *10* references to the shaved head are not required by the narrative or the *mise-en-scène*.

Within the context of the director's *oeuvre* and its relationship to the *Muslim female subject*, close-ups of attractive women in colourful clothes thus render Kiarostami's filmic discourse a direct engagement with historio-specific regulations concerning



the *Muslim female subject*; and the shaved head (an evasion of the *veil*) can here be seen as a direct response to the institutionalization of *veiling* in Iranian cinema that had hitherto informed and governed her representation. The director's critique of this reaches its peak in Chapter 2, where the *Muslim female subject* is finally physically dissociated from the *veil*, heretofore an almost entirely inextricable prerequisite of her appearance on screen.

*10* explores the many frustrations of its female characters in a series of confessional conversations, with the sense of dissatisfaction most pronounced in the driver herself, signalled clearly in the exposition of the second chapter, which opens with her sigh. After the passenger exposes her head, the driver tells her not to put her *veil* back on, claiming 'it doesn't matter now, let your head breathe.' The implication that the *veil* is an impediment that suffocates is clearly marked in her choice of words, which elide the removal of the *veil* and a sense of freedom and life. If *10* is concerned with the female voice and its expression then these concerns are here encapsulated visually in the act of *unveiling*. The metaphoric resonances of this moment thus identify the *veil* with the silencing of the female voice that *10* seeks to refute. Structurally, the film begins with the driver stating that in order to live, a woman needs to die; towards the end it presents an image of a woman who *unveils* in order to 'breathe,' her shaved head a visual signifier of the female voice that refuses to be suffocated in order to live.

Zayzafoon examines the way in which the metaphor of the *veil* in the field of French feminism and psychoanalysis is rooted in earlier discourses on Muslim women and Islam.<sup>118</sup> Contending 'that the subject of feminism speaks from a double position



that is both inside/outside ideology,' she argues that Hélène Cixous' *écriture féminine* 'presents a "double vision," which both reproduces and resists those Orientalist discourses on the veil.'<sup>119</sup> Zayzafoon interrogates the success of Cixous' project to establish a feminine language that can 'escape the infernal repetition' and reproduction of the old 'system' and 'invent new worlds,' through deconstructing references to the *veil*.<sup>120</sup> She refers to 'the most traumatic event' in Cixous' life in Algeria, where she witnesses the death of a woman whose *veil* became entangled with a fairground ride.<sup>121</sup> Zayzafoon contends that in Cixous' version of this event, 'the veil becomes a metaphor for Islam's amputation of female sexuality and repression of women's voices,' and asks, 'how can this "veiled woman" speak when her death is reappropriated and reconstituted as a metaphor for the "tragedy of a town, a country, a history"?'<sup>122</sup> She writes,

this Algerian veiled woman is made to unspeak, as her death screams are interpreted according to the Western center (*écriture féminine*) equating visibility and voice with female freedom, and veiling and silence with female amputation and oppression.<sup>123</sup>

She thus concludes that, in presenting the *Muslim female subject* as passive and silent, Cixous ignores the role of the *haik* in the Algerian resistance and effectively denies 'the semiotic mutability of the veil.'<sup>124</sup> Zayzafoon also makes reference to Iran, citing Homa Hoodfar, who in 'The Veil in Their Minds and on Ours Heads' censures the 'naïve' alignment of *de-veiling* with the liberation of the female subject.<sup>125</sup> Zayzafoon cites Butler's warning against the universalization of



patriarchy, which ‘erases and elides the “distinct articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts.”’<sup>126</sup>

In Chapter 2, Kiarostami himself ignores this distinction through the metaphoric resonances of the passenger’s *unveiling* ‘to breathe.’ Though he attempts to locate a resistant site of representation for the *Muslim female subject*, his recourse in this instance to a visual expression of the paradigm of *unveiling* as a means to liberate the female voice unavoidably renders his discourse a reproduction of the very phallogentrism he attempts to preclude. In his criticism of the institutionalization of modesty, Kiarostami therefore presents a ‘double vision’ which ‘both reproduces and resists’ the patriarchal discourses which have come to govern the *Muslim female subject* on screen. To appropriate Zayzafoon, in both its criticism of censorship regulations and its attempt to represent ‘the female body’ and recuperate ‘the woman’s voice’ through *unveiling*, *10* and the works discussed in this analysis posit the *veil* as a metaphor ‘for patriarchy’s repression of female sexuality and silencing of women’s voices,’ such that the *Muslim female subject* is made to unspeak.<sup>127</sup> In their (dis)articulation of the *Muslim female subject* as embodying the censored and silenced subject, where *veiling* signifies oppression, Kiarostami and the artists here referred to effectively deny the semiotic mutability of the *veil*.

Zayzafoon engages with a passage from Cixous’ ‘The Laugh of the Medusa,’ where she identifies that the *veil* is upheld in her text as ‘an unchanging signifier of female victimization,’ and a ‘metaphor for historic marginalization.’<sup>128</sup> She writes that ‘the veil of the “Muslim woman” has become in Western feminist writing a prenarrated space, that is, a metaphor for a backward and repressive Muslim East.’<sup>129</sup>



Kiarostami's disassociation of the *veil* from the *Muslim female subject* renders his discourse resistant to the very regulations that have heretofore informed her cinematic representation. However, his recourse in executing the *veil*'s mobility through the paradigm of *unveiling*, which he associates with the female voice, nevertheless upholds the *veil* as an 'unchanging signifier' and a 'metaphor for historic marginalization.' As a product of the paradigm of *unveiling*, the shaved head in Chapter 2 of *10* is here presented as a prenarrated space, a metaphor for a freedom otherwise denied by the *veil*.

As demonstrated throughout this study, the paradigm of *unveiling*, born out of the colonial narrative of the *veil*, is a dominant mode of subject formation in Orientalist discourse, which posits the *Muslim female subject* upon epistemological ground that enables (European) patriarchal subjectivity to articulate itself as sovereign. As established, Pontecorvo refers to the theme of *unveiling* in the final sequence of *The Battle of Algiers* to encapsulate national liberation in the anti-colonial struggle. Samira Makhmalbaf similarly employs the paradigm of *unveiling*, which is emphatically inscribed on the body of her protagonist, to signify a direct conflict between oppression and emancipation. Within the context of Lowe's 'heterotopicality,' outlined in Chapter One, the paradigm of *unveiling* can be seen as a dominant discursive formation, whose 'multiple inscriptions' in Iranian cinema emerge as a reanimation of the colonial narrative of the *veil* and its ideology. It could thus be argued that within the paradigm of *unveiling*, the *veil*, as in Cixous' text, is upheld as an 'unchanging signifier' of female silence and oppression, and that the



*unveiled Muslim female body* produced as a result constitutes a prenarrated space, a metaphor for a freedom denied by ‘a backward and repressive Muslim East.’

Significantly, in *10* the transference of the *veil* is represented in a single shot in which the passenger *unveils*. In *Daughters of the Sun*, however, the opening sequence extends the process of transference over the first three shots, during which the *veil* gradually diminishes within the frame (refer to Figure 4.9). In DS.1 the *veil* is vividly represented by both the protagonist who wears it and through reference to the three girls in the backdrop. In DS.2 the *veil* is shown in long shot and is barely visible, yet appears in its entirety as it rests on the protagonist’s shoulder. DS.3 presents the contrary, since here the protagonist appears in close-up whilst the *veil* is merely referenced at the bottom of the frame. In these shots references to the *veil* are increasingly reduced and culminate in its complete evasion on screen in the final shot of the series (DS.6). Whilst both directors use the shaved head in their depiction of the transference of the *veil*, Shahriar alone succeeds in resisting the paradigm of *unveiling* in her evasion of the *veil* on screen. *Daughters of the Sun* is laudable for the way it resists upholding the *veil* as a signifier of silence and oppression, which as demonstrated constitutes a paradigmatic feature that predominates enactments of the evasion of the *veil*.

Kiarostami’s portrayal of the mobility of the *veil* in *10* stands as a direct response to the institutionalization of modesty, for his diegesis does not necessitate that the *veil* be evaded on screen. It could be argued that his screen discourse is more concerned with capturing the evasion of the *veil* as opposed to representing the shaved head within his cinematic narrative. From this point of view, his stance resembles a



reinstatement, with *unveiling* functioning as a direct retort to the institutionalization of modesty and the implementation of the *veil* as a prerequisite on screen. Although his evasion of the *veil* is commendable in its attempt to dismantle patriarchal mechanisms of representation, his recourse to the employment of the paradigm of *unveiling* in this manner brings to mind Chow's indictment of Alloula's images, discussed in Chapter One. Though Kiarostami's screen discourse is not an attempt to counteract colonial domination, as is the case with Alloula, Garanger and Pontecorvo, it is nonetheless analogous in its (re)inscription of the *unveiled Muslim female body* as a restorative site in the quest to reinvent subjectivity.

Crucially, in as far as the paradigm of *unveiling* is situated within the relations of *veiling/invisibility/silence* and *unveiling/visibility/voice*, its repeated employment as a means to recuperate voice constitutes a form of epistemic violence, which is predicated on the assumption that the *Muslim female subject* is a voiceless subject. Postcolonial feminist scholarship has extensively deliberated the predicament entailed in attempts to recover a denied voice and agency. Spivak asserts that those who are privileged to speak must distinguish between their position and those who are configured in discourse, where failure to do so serves merely to reproduce the other in our own image and voice.<sup>130</sup> She calls for a systematic unlearning of one's privilege in order to commence an ethical relation with the other, distinguishing between *speaking for/listening to* and *speaking to* the subaltern.<sup>131</sup> She cites Derrida, who 'marks the danger in appropriating the other in radical critique' and advocates 'a rewriting of the utopian structural impulse as "rendering delirious that interior voice that is the voice of the other in us."'”<sup>132</sup> As this chapter has shown, the



assumption that the *Muslim female subject* is inherently silent, and that her voice and agency are achievable only through *unveiling*, further expose the problematics of employing this paradigm, which, alongside the fact that it is indissociable from its colonial past, is once again confirmed as an act of epistemic violence and a mode of subject constitution.

This chapter has demonstrated, however, that the mobility of the *veil* can be executed outside the process of the paradigm of *unveiling* and, moreover, that it need not define the *veil* within discourses of silence and recuperation. The evasion of the *veil* can thus be enacted independently of its colonial history, such that the over-representation of the *Muslim female subject* as a product of *unveiling* is hereby transcended. I therefore deem it necessary to move beyond this paradigm if we are to identify a site for the mobility of the *veil*. Indeed, it is only in this way that it becomes possible to dismantle the regulatory framework of the *Muslim female subject* established by Islamic patriarchal discourses, and simultaneously transcend the colonial discourses that have both informed the evasion of the *veil* and governed the not-veiled *Muslim female subject*.

On the subject of the native as image, Chow further explains that ‘the agency of the native cannot simply be imagined in terms of a resistance against the image,’ but rather ‘needs to be rethought as that which bears witness to its own demolition – in a form which is at once image and gaze, but a gaze that exceeds the moment of colonization.’<sup>133</sup> Significantly, in his construction of the *Muslim female subject* in



the *unveiling* scenario, Kiarostami neglects what Chow identifies as the problem in ‘the reinvention of subjectivity,’ namely that,

it tries to combat the politics of the image, a politics that is conducted on surfaces, by a politics of depth, hidden truths and inner voices. The most important aspect of this image – its power precisely as image and nothing else – is thus bypassed and left untouched.<sup>134</sup>

In Kiarostami’s presentation of the shaved head as a visual signifier of the female voice and a site for spectatorial pleasure, it could be argued, as Chow maintains with reference to Alloula’s reproduction of postcards, that the *Muslim female subject’s* ‘nakedness stares back at him both as the defiled image of his creation *and* as the indifferent gaze that says, “there was nothing – no secret – to be unveiled underneath my clothes. That secret is your phantasm.”’<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion on the absence of women in the films of Abbas Kiarostami, see: Negar Mottahedeh, ‘Where are Kiarostami’s Women?’ in Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour, eds, *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 310–33, p. 314; Azadeh Farahmand, ‘Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema,’ in Richard Tapper, ed., *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity* (London: Tauris, 2002), pp. 86–108, pp. 99–100.

<sup>2</sup> The only variation in the position of the camera occurs in Chapter 7 where the passenger, a prostitute, is only represented in long shot as she crosses the road.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Herrera, ‘Downveiling: Shifting Socio-Religious Practices in Egypt,’ in *International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World*, Newsletter 6 (October 2000), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Herrera, ‘Downveiling: Gender and the Contest Over Culture in Cairo,’ in *Middle East Report: Culture and Politics*, Number 219 (Summer 2001), pp. 16–9, p. 16. I am grateful to Dr. Nadjé Al-Ali for referring me to this article.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Bradshaw, *Guardian*, 16 August 2002, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Julian Graffy, *Sight and Sound*, Volume 12, Issue 10 (October 2002), p. 57.

<sup>7</sup> Sukhdev Sandhu, *Daily Telegraph*, 27 September 2002, p. 25; Philip French, *Observer Review*, 29 September 2002, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> James Christopher, *Times* 2, 26 September 2002, pp.10–1.

<sup>9</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Chow (1993), p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> Julian Graffy, *Sight and Sound*, Volume 12, Issue 10 (October 2002), p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Walker, *Evening Standard*, 26 September 2002, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Chow (1993), p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 27.



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- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 28.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 190.
- <sup>25</sup> Zayzafoon (2005), p. 3.
- <sup>26</sup> Herrera (2001), p. 16.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 17.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Herrera (2000), p. 32.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> The term *downveiling* transcends the moralistic binary terms popularly employed in Iran of 'good *hijāb*' and 'bad *hijāb*.' Herrera draws an alignment between *downveiling* and the term 'bad *hijāb*' in Iran. Herrera (2001), pp. 16–7.
- <sup>33</sup> Ossman (2002), p. 15.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid. She then proposes that it is also necessary in modern fashion to 'establish a repertory of old, enclosed bodies stuck in place,' where 'reactions to these "remainders" sometimes provoke violent contrasts of one body to another: the open to the enclosed, light to heavy,' which can 'also encourage people to rework forms in new ways.' Ibid., pp. 15–6.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 56.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> *Bidoun: Icons*, Issue 5 (Fall 2005), pp. 110–7.
- <sup>39</sup> These include Persian tiles, rosary beads, shrines, carpets, and the pose of one of the female models. The fashion spread includes an introduction by the Iranian/Los Angeles based fashion designer Hushidar Mortezaie, here responsible for the Art Direction and Styling, who further states that, 'the shoot is a dedication to the free spirit of these unbelievable youth, who with severe restrictions and few resources create fashion looks that upstage the most current Parisian fashion spectacles.' Ibid., p. 110.
- <sup>40</sup> Ossman (2002), p. 56.
- <sup>41</sup> *Bidoun: Icons* (Fall 2005).
- <sup>42</sup> Kaja Silverman, 'Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse,' in Tania Modeleski, ed., *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 139–52.
- <sup>43</sup> The indoor *chador* is commonly found in varying fabrics and colours whilst the outdoor *chador* is predominantly black. However, prior to the Revolution, the outdoor *chador* was similarly available in different colours and fabrics.
- <sup>44</sup> Ossman (2002), p. 15.
- <sup>45</sup> Hamid Naficy, 'Veiled Visions/Powerful Presences: Women in Post-revolutionary Iranian Cinema,' in Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl, eds., *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-revolutionary Iran* (London: Tauris, 1994), pp. 131–50. For a cross-regional analysis of the changing portrayal of women in cinemas with reference to Islam, see Gönül Dönmez-Colin, *Women, Islam and Cinema* (London: Reaktion, 2004).
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 132.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 132–3.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 133.
- <sup>52</sup> For further readings of *Nargess*, see: Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future* (London: Verso, 2001), pp. 213–43; Sheila Whitaker, 'Rakhshan Bani-Etemad,' in Rose Issa and Sheila Whitaker, eds., *Life and Art: The New Iranian Cinema* (London: BFI National Film



Theatre, 1999), pp. 66–73. For a discussion on the polarization of women in Iranian cinema, see: Shahla Lahiji, 'Chaste Dolls and Unchaste Dolls: Women in Iranian Cinema since 1979,' in Tapper (2002), pp. 215–26.

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion on the relationship between active women and censorship, see Naficy (1994).

<sup>54</sup> Farahmand (2002), p. 108. See also Hamid Naficy, 'Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update,' in Tapper (2002), pp. 26–65.

<sup>55</sup> Mina Modares, 'Women and Shi'ism in Iran,' in *m/f*, Volume 5, Issue 6 (1981), pp. 63–81, p. 63.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 67. She also engages with Yahya Nuri's *Women's Rights in Islam and the World* (1964) and Morteza Motahhari's [sic] *The System of Women's Rights in Islam* (1974). Ayatollah Murtaza Mutahhari explains the command for women to *veil* as resulting from 'the female instinct which, because of its particular nature, wishes to capture hearts and imprison the male. Thus the deviation begins with the female instinct and therefore the command to cover was issued.' Murtaza Mutahhari, *The Islamic Modest Dress*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1992), pp. 13–4. See also Murtada Mutahhari [sic], *The Rights of Women in Islam* (Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Services, 1980).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Azar Tabari, *Feminist Review*, Number 5 (1980), pp. 19–31, p. 25. For an analysis of the transformation of the *veil* within the context of the military and Iran's *Mujāhidīn* movement, see Shirazi (2003), pp. 110–37.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Derrida (1978), p. 200.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Mohammed Hassan Khoshnevis, Director of Iran's Cultural Research Bureau, 27 December 2003, Tehran.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. For the use of young girls as substitutes for the *Muslim female subject* within the context of modesty regulations in Iran, see Appendix D.

<sup>66</sup> See: Farahmand (2002), p. 106; Hamid Naficy, 'Iranian Cinema,' in Oliver Leaman, ed., *Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 167–70, 187–92.

<sup>67</sup> Modesty regulations are not applicable when representing the *Muslim female subject* in *Bidoun* as these are not upheld by its editors and consequently the journal is published outside of Iran.

<sup>68</sup> Naficy observes that Abol-Hasan Bani-Sadr, the first post-revolutionary president, 'claimed in a speech that a woman's hair gives off certain powerful "rays" that transform the men and must therefore be contained by a veil or a scarf.' Naficy (1999), p. 64.

<sup>69</sup> The use of the shaved head in the transference of the *veil* in Iranian cinema is also employed in Massud Kimyai's *The Lead* (1989); Ali Reza Davoodnezhad's *The Bad Children* (2001); and Manijeh Hekmat's *Women's Prisons* (2002).

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Mohammed Hassan Khoshnevis, (2003)

<sup>71</sup> Culler (1994), p. 103.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Butler (1990), p. 139.

<sup>74</sup> Sara Salih, 'Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions,' in Sara Salih and Judith Butler, eds, *The Judith Butler Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 90–118, 91.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 138

<sup>76</sup> Haleh Afshar, *Islam and Feminisms: An Iranian Case Study* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 204–5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?,' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, ed., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313, p. 307.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



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- <sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 308.
- <sup>84</sup> An illustration of this is offered by Farzaneh Milani, who engages with the writing of Iranian women's writing within the context of 'veiling and unveiling, silence and revelation.' This paradigm of *veiling/silence, unveiling/voice* is upheld not only in the poetry she engages with, but in the title and object of study of the publication as a whole. Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (New York: Syracuse University Press 1992).
- <sup>85</sup> Zanganeh (2006), p. xvi.
- <sup>86</sup> For a discussion of the *veil* in representations of Islamic female martyrdom, see Shirazi (2003), pp. 88–137.
- <sup>87</sup> Hélène Bastais, in *Shirin Neshat: Women of Allah, Photographies, Films, Vidéos* (Paris: Maison Européenne de la Photographie, 1998), p. 14.
- <sup>88</sup> Farzaneh Milani, 'The Visual Poetry of Shirin Neshat,' in *Shirin Neshat* (Milan: Charta, 2001), p. 6–13, p. 7.
- <sup>89</sup> Spivak (1988), p. 295.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>92</sup> Artists' statement on *Freedom is Boring, Censorship is Fun* (Tehran, 2006).
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>94</sup> Naficy (1994), p. 132.
- <sup>95</sup> Mottahedeh (2004), p. 313.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 330–1.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 318.
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 331.
- <sup>99</sup> Foucault (1977), p. 202.
- <sup>100</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 119.
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 108.
- <sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 109.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 109–10.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>105</sup> Ibid. The relationship between *unveiling* and truth has also been addressed in relation to the *Ka'ba*, the centre of the holy site of pilgrimage in Makkah. Tim Winter writes that the *Ka'ba*'s status 'as a veiled structure' has been repeatedly commented upon. He continues that the *Ka'ba* 'becomes the symbol of the pre-existence of God; and the *kiswa*, the black veil which always shrouds it, is the veil which we must lift if we are to come to *al-Haqq*, the Real.' Winter (2004), p. 147. El Guindi remarks that 'the link between dress, women and sanctity of space is also reflected in the Islamic rituals of "dressing" the *Ka'ba*,' explaining how Richard Burton was perhaps the first Western commentator to identify 'a relation between key elements in the rites of the preparation of the *Ka'ba* for the annual pilgrimage and metaphorically "dressing" the *Ka'ba* like a bride.' El Guindi (1999), p. 95. For an analysis of the relationship between the *veil* as a mark of precariousness and the paradigm of woman as untruth in Western film, see: Mary Ann Doane's seminal essay 'Veiling Over Desire: Close-Ups of the Woman,' in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 44–75; Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as Masquerade,' in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, eds., *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 35–44.
- <sup>106</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), p. 110.
- <sup>107</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>108</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993), pp. 84–5.
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>110</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>111</sup> Macdonald (2006), p. 11.
- <sup>112</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 17.
- <sup>114</sup> Ibid., pp. 17–8.
- <sup>115</sup> Farahmand (2002), p. 99.
- <sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 100.
- <sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 108.
- <sup>118</sup> Zayzafoon (2005), p. 65.



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- <sup>119</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>120</sup> Ibid. p. 80
- <sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 81
- <sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 82
- <sup>123</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 83.
- <sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 84. Hoodfar recounts how in 1936 the Shah's father passed a law to modernize Iran, 'without any legal and socioeconomic adjustments,' where 'women who refused to take off the veil because of their religious beliefs became dependent upon their male relatives' (p. 84).
- <sup>126</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 81.
- <sup>128</sup> Zayzafoon (2005), pp. 80–1. Cixous writes, 'It is writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem [*sic*].' Ibid., p. 80. In *Sortie* she writes, 'Is this me, this nobody that is dressed up, wrapped in veils, carefully kept distant, pushed to the side of History and change, nullified, kept out of the way, on the edge of the stage, on the kitchen side, the bedside?' (p. 81).
- <sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 80.
- <sup>130</sup> Spivak (1988), p. 280.
- <sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 295.
- <sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 308.
- <sup>133</sup> Chow (1993), p. 51.
- <sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 29.
- <sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 52.



#### **4 'Immodest Modesty':**

##### **Accommodating Dissent and the Production(s) of Islamic National Discourse**

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In 2002 the Middle East satellite channel MBC launched an hour-long weekly talk show programme entitled *Kalām Nawā'im* (Sweet Talk), in which four female television presenters and their featured guests discuss current social issues within the region of the Arab-speaking Middle East.<sup>1</sup> In May 2006, in a two part series, the show chose the question of women's rights in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as its subject of focus. In these episodes, with their Saudi guests ranging from young businesswomen and fashion designers to the regionally acclaimed male singer, Abadi Al-Jawhar, the presenters continually referred to the way in which the woman's question in Saudi Arabia has been the subject of a recent and heated international debate.<sup>2</sup>

In one episode of the series, one of the presenters, Fawzia Salameh, after highlighting the recent debate, stated, 'We don't want to cover this subject according to how Americans and the West see it but rather we want to approach it according to our way.'<sup>3</sup> Amongst those interviewed, Al-Jawahar was asked to comment on such issues as the interest and pressure from the Western world concerning women's rights in Saudi Arabia, the position of Woman according to Islam, and in particular the law prohibiting women from driving.<sup>4</sup> The singer explained that the Western world does not understand 'our society,' that 'in the West, women have unsuitable jobs, whilst women here are treasured, protected and honoured.' He added, 'the Saudi woman is privileged and honoured more than any other woman since she is driven everywhere.'<sup>5</sup> There followed an awkward and bemused moment before the



presenters decided rather abruptly to move on to a commercial break, first making clear their opinion that it should be a matter of choice.<sup>6</sup>

The increase in female presence in the media within the Arab World has received considerable recent scholarly attention, most significantly since the Qatar-based satellite channel Al-Jazeera received widespread international interest for its coverage of post-September 11<sup>th</sup> US foreign policy in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> In 'Women, Development and Al-Jazeera: A Balance Sheet,' Naomi Sakr explains how 'growth in viewership and in the number of talk shows focusing on socio-political issues created an unprecedented opportunity for televised debates on women's status in the region.'<sup>8</sup> These debates, she explains, 'took place in shows defined primarily by their format ... or their subject matter.'<sup>9</sup> She adds, however, that 'more often, they took place in shows clearly demarcated as intended for female audiences through titles like *Laki* [sic] (the feminine form of 'for you'), *Kalam Nowaim* [sic] (Talk of the Fair Sex), and *Lil Nissa Faqat* [sic] (For Women Only).'<sup>10</sup>

In her paper 'Heya [sic] Television: A feminist counterpublic for Arab women's empowerment?' Dina Matar focuses on the Lebanese satellite channel *Hīyah* (She), which specifically targets female audiences within the Arab world, describing how it was intended to establish 'what its managers and producers promised to be a cultural revolution that would not only provide a platform for women to voice their concerns, but also empower them.'<sup>11</sup> Matar makes reference to the Arab world's changing media landscape when she suggests that,



In these communicative spaces, not only is there a palpable increase in the visible presence of women in the media, but also a substantial increase in discussions about taboo subjects concerning women, such as premarital sex, violence against women, religious extremism and honour killing, arguably contributing to the changing power dynamics in Arab society.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the attention *Kalām Nawā'im* has received within the region, the talk show has also witnessed coverage from the Western press. An article by Carla Power in *Newsweek International* entitled 'Look Who's Talking' associates it with a wider debate on democracy in the Middle East:

In countries where the media have traditionally been controlled by information ministries, fierce new competition among stations has empowered ordinary citizens with remote controls. And the spate of shows filling those channels is rapidly broadening the range of voices heard in the Arab world.<sup>13</sup>

Power explains that 'you'd never guess Kalam Nawaem [sic]... is radical TV. Wreathed in soft pinks and grays, four women chat and giggle on plump cream sofas.'<sup>14</sup> She continues, 'In some of the most repressive regimes of the Arab world, liberation is arriving in the form of homegrown reality and talk TV.'<sup>15</sup> Power explains that for the talk show, 'the biggest draw' is the diversity of its hosts, where 'the Palestinian Bseiso, the Lebanese Barghout, a London-based Egyptian and a veiled Saudi Arabian doctoral candidate represent four varied view points.'<sup>16</sup>

Whilst *Kalām Nawā'im* has received significant coverage in the press, one of its presenters, the 'veiled' Saudi Arabian Muna Abu Sulayman, has been the subject of



intense regional and international scrutiny since her first appearance on screen at its launch in 2002. Of the international attention she has received, most significant has been her appearance on CNN's *Inside the Middle East* (2005), and the recognition by the United Nations for her social work in Saudi Arabia when she was made UNDP Good Will Ambassador in December 2005.

In an interview I conducted with Abu Sulayman, the presenter explained that the regional interest in her is primarily due to her being Saudi Arabian and the fact that very few women had appeared on the international screen before her (Refer to Figure 5.1).<sup>17</sup> However, the interest of the international media, she claimed, was due to the fact that she 'was a *muhajjabah* (veiled) and did not look *mubahdalah* (unkempt),' adding, 'yes, it was because of the way I wore my clothes.'<sup>18</sup> She continues, 'being a *muhajjabah* doesn't necessarily mean that you lose your sense of style, you can still look good and wear a *hijāb* and I think that was a major moment in TV.'<sup>19</sup>



Figure 5.1: *Muna Abu Sulayam* (2002)

In my previous chapter I identified the way in which the film critics consistently described actress Mania Akbari's appearance in *10*, where signifiers of style were nuanced as incongruous when related to the *Muslim female subject*. Abu Sulayman



met a similar response from the international media, commenting herself on the abundant interest in the way she dresses. This media focus is clearly a demonstration of the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers that prevents the *Muslim female subject* from being realized as the 'anywhere body,' where Abu Sulayman's style and the fact that she is fluent in English are upheld as incongruous with her supposed authenticity since, as she states, 'internationally, people were impressed because I was a *muhajjabah* who wasn't "backward" and who spoke English.'<sup>20</sup> In this light, Abu Sulayman explains that the reason she continues to give interviews is precisely to challenge such stereotypes concerning the *veil*.<sup>21</sup>

As regards her local and regional audience, she explains that she uses dress itself as a means to communicate with 'her society':

I learned a lot of tricks ... I am not a feminist but I am pro-women. Women have had a lot of rights that have been taken away from them by men. The day I know I am going to say something revolutionary on the subject of education, the judiciary system, custody, divorce and rights in marriage, I wear my scarf better, in other words, no hair shows. I don't want [the audience] to resist my ideas and what I am saying based on them thinking that I am not a good *muhajjabah*, so I make sure that visually I am in the right context, so that they listen to me and are more willing to accept what I say. In other words, they are seeing someone who looks like their idea of what a good *muhajjabah* looks like, no hair showing and no tight clothes.<sup>22</sup>

She adds that in such circumstances she actually moves her *veil* forward 'about an inch' because ordinarily 'about an inch of my hair shows.'<sup>23</sup> This and other sartorial 'tricks' she employs are a means through which visually she creates 'the right



context,' which in this instance refers to the moral and ideological terrain concerning constructions of Islamic female modesty and a sense of 'appropriate' female social conduct.<sup>24</sup>

In his theory on the use of 'tactics' in everyday life, Michel De Certeau argues that certain practices introduce '*artistic tricks ... into a system,*' explaining that 'there are countless ways of "making do."'<sup>25</sup> He observes how a person 'insinuates *into* the system imposed on him' by means of what he terms 'ways of dwelling':

He superimposes them, and, by that combination, creates for himself a space in which he can find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation.<sup>26</sup>

De Certeau describes a tactic 'as a guileful ruse' and 'a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus.'<sup>27</sup> Unlike a strategy, which he defines as 'the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships,' the space of the tactic 'must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power.'<sup>28</sup> Whilst a strategy 'is organized by the postulation of power,' a tactic 'is determined by *the absence of power.*'<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the space of the tactic 'takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them' and is therein a manoeuvre "within the enemy's field of vision"... and within enemy territory.'<sup>30</sup> He adds that, 'in short, a tactic is an art of the weak.'<sup>31</sup>



Abu Sulayman's claim, 'I learned a lot of tricks,' brings to mind De Certeau's 'artistic tricks' and his analysis of the deployment of tactics in everyday life. In the interview above, the presenter clearly reveals how she operates within a power dynamic, since she refers to a 'society' who may potentially reject her ideas if she were not to appear 'as *their* idea of' what constitutes 'a good *muhajjabah*.' In light of De Certeau, therefore, Abu Sulayman wearing her scarf 'better' can be deemed a tactic, a manoeuvre within a certain ideological terrain, since in order to voice her opinions on contentious subjects, she 'takes advantage of opportunities and depends on them.'

It is important to note that Abu Sulayman's appearance on MBC does not require that she endorse or represent Islamic values, since it is an independent satellite channel whose female presenters predominantly do not comply with the dictates of Islamic modesty in dress. However, my interview with the presenter revealed that she identifies her style and screen persona as functioning in accordance with Islamic female modesty. She explains that the way in which she is *veiled* does not contradict the notion of the *hijāb* according to *sharī'a* since what is revealed of her hair is not used as a 'symbol of [her] sexuality,' that is, to entice or provoke. She further explains that she advocates women's rights in as far as 'the family' is concerned, that she is in principle 'not a feminist' and that she identifies herself as 'an Islamist.'<sup>32</sup> In order to accommodate her screen persona on MBC and simultaneously to appellate her 'ideas' within an ideological terrain defined by a hegemonic discourse, Abu Sulayman 'creates for [herself] a space in which [she] can find ways of using the constraining order of the place.' Through manipulating



her *veil*, the presenter practises the ‘art of being in between’ and ‘draws unexpected results from [her] situation.’

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, De Certeau introduces his theory on the notion of uses and tactics by emphasizing the importance of ‘the nature of these operations’ in as far as ‘*power relationships* define the networks in which they are described and delimit the circumstances from which they can profit.’<sup>33</sup> In this context he states, ‘we are concerned with battles or games between the strong and the weak, and with the “actions,” which remain possible for the latter.’<sup>34</sup> This chapter is concerned with what De Certeau terms ‘ways of operating’ or ‘making do’ in the production(s) of Islamic national discourse in the region of the Arab Gulf States.<sup>35</sup> It analyses the languages and tactics employed in constructions of the *Muslim female subject* within social and popular practices that work within the parameters of a hegemonic discourse. My first analysis examines shampoo advertising for Saudi Arabian Television, exploring the methods through which modesty is maintained and the vocabulary of stylistic techniques employed when constructing the *Muslim female subject* on screen. My second analysis investigates the phenomenon of fashioning the ‘*abāyah* (Islamic female national dress) within the region of the Arab Gulf States and similarly examines the way in which contemporary fashion designers ‘make do’ in their constructions of the ‘*abāyah*-as-fashion within the boundaries of an institutionalized form of Islamic national dress. I explore the extent to which these manifestations of the ‘*abāyah* contest ideological constructions of dress as defined by influential religious scholars and the state. In both analyses the *Muslim female subject* is situated as a discursive effect of Islamic national discourse, where



references to the '*abāyah*' and its socio-legal implementation are to be understood in light of Benedict Anderson's conception of nations as 'imagined communities.'<sup>36</sup> In this sense, the implementation of Islamic national dress is here considered, as McClintock summarizes, as part of a 'system of cultural representation' that engenders 'a shared experience of identification' within the region of the Arab Gulf States.<sup>37</sup>

In both discussions, I examine the way in which the productions of the *Muslim female subject* relate to the dissemination of Islamic national discourses and interrogate the manner in which they comply with or resist the Islamic patriarchal hegemonic order. My employment of the term 'Islamic patriarchal hegemonic order' is not meant to imply the imposition of power by a stable and unmodified dominant group.<sup>38</sup> Rather, hegemony is here understood, as by Lowe, as 'a process through which a particular group overtly or covertly gains consent of other groups to determine the political and ideological state of the society.'<sup>39</sup> It is crucial to underline the notion of consent with reference to the socio-legal implementation of Islamic national dress and the institutionalization of modesty on Saudi Arabian Television. My aim in this analysis is to interrogate the nature of consent in as far as the transference and mobility of the *veil* is concerned, so as then to examine how productions of the *Muslim female subject* are accommodated by the Islamic patriarchal hegemonic order.

It is here important to stress that my analysis of paradoxes and contradictions is not intended to uphold a supposed opposition between, on the one hand, the local and



the authentic and, on the other, the global and the Western so as to then stand 'external' to the local.<sup>40</sup> Rather, the contradictions here engendered relate to authentic and ideological constructions of femininity and dress and the antagonism engendered between their dissent and accommodation in contemporary visual culture and social practice. To speak of an immodest modesty in this instance, therefore, does not imply an incongruity between contemporary culture and the *Muslim female subject*, but rather refers to the way in which the mobility of the *veil* is accommodated by, contests and resists ideological and authentic constructions of the *Muslim female subject* as defined by the hegemonic order of Islamic patriarchy. It is important to emphasize that the following analyses rely heavily on primary sources such as interviews and websites owing to a considerable lack of academic scholarship in the field of popular culture within the region of the Arab Gulf States.

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<sup>1</sup> *Kalām Nawā'im* may be translated from Arabic into 'Sweet Talk' or 'Talk of the Fairer Sex.'

<sup>2</sup> *Kalām Nawā'im*, aired on MBC, 14 and 21 May 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *Kalām Nawā'im*, aired on MBC, 21 May 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Dina Matar, 'Heya [*sic*] Television: A feminist counterpublic for Arab women's empowerment?', in Annabelle Srebreny and Gholam Khiabbany, eds., *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> Naomi Sakr, *The Al-Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media*, ed., Mohamed Zayani (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 127.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 127–8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>11</sup> Matar (forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Carla Power, 'Look Who's Talking,' in *Newsweek*, August, 2005:

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8767994/site/newsweek/>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Muna Abu Sulayman, 3 June 2006, Al-Riyadh. All translations from Arabic in this chapter are by Noura Al-Noman.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



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- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> For further discussion, see Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- <sup>25</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 29–30.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 30.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 37.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 35–7.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 38.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 37.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 37.
- <sup>32</sup> Interview with Muna Abu Sulayman, 3 June 2006, Al-Riyadh.
- <sup>33</sup> De Certeau (1984), p. 34.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 30–5.
- <sup>36</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 1–7.
- <sup>37</sup> McClintock (1995), p. 353.
- <sup>38</sup> Lowe (1994), p. 17.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Yael Navaro-Yashin argues “‘Culture’ has too often been conceptualised as distinct from the domain of commodification. Anthropologists have written numerous ethnographies of the disruption or transformation of ‘culture’ through the incoming forces of capitalism. Like the concepts of structure and change, products of binarism, the categories of “culture” and “economy” too have been pit against each other to overlook their inherency. When “culture” has been too easily mapped onto what is local, “economy,” even after centuries of capitalism, all around the globe, has been associated with ‘what is Western,’ and therefore with what is “external” to and supposedly contradicts “authentic local culture.”” Navaro-Yashin, ‘The Market for Identities: Secularism, Islamism, Commodities’ in Deniz Kandiyoti and Ayse Saktanber, eds, *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey* (London: Tauris, 2002), pp. 221–53, p. 221.



#### 4.1 Shampoo:

##### Editing, Advertising and Codes of Modesty in Saudi Arabian Television

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As discussed in Chapter Three, Naficy argued that the institutionalization of modesty in Iran, founded by regulations set in 1982, required Iranian directors to work within Islamic strictures concerning the construction of the *Muslim female subject* on screen.<sup>1</sup> Here, I briefly discussed the centrality of the *Muslim female subject* in Islamic national discourse as exemplified by the implementation of institutionalized forms of dress by state-run television stations alongside the distinction in censorship regulations from the MCIG relating to Iranian women. In this context, Yuval-Davis and Anthias' contention, outlined in Chapter One, that woman is rendered the signifier of national difference and constitutes the 'symbolic configuration' of the national group is pertinent to screen representations of the *Muslim female subject* and the formation of the Islamic national collective, which is invariably informed as a result of a wider debate on Islamic consciousness and the ideology of the Islamic Revolution of 1979.<sup>2</sup>

In Saudi Arabia, with the seizure of the Great Mosque in Makkah by Juhayman Al-Otiabi and his group of radical Islamists in November 1979, a reinforced construction of an Islamic national discourse similarly required that representations of women abide by the Islamic codes of modesty.<sup>3</sup> The symbol of the *veil* became imbued with a heightened significance for its role not only in upholding codes of modesty but in its role in disseminating Islamic *da'wah* (proselytizing message). The relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



in 1979 is seen to have marked the genesis of a quest for global Islamic leadership within the region and is referenced in this instance to provide a historio-specific context for understanding how constructions of the *Muslim female subject* relate to the productions of Islamic national discourses in the Persian/Arab Gulf.<sup>4</sup>

In Chapter Three, the practices of downveiling and the en-lightening process alongside the evasion of the *veil* were executed within censorship regulations, where Islamic codes of modesty were challenged but necessarily maintained. Here I made reference to Ali Shari'ati's *Fatima is Fatima*, which challenged the ideological transformation of dress and advocated instead that any modest clothing was sufficient. Shari'ati's contention came at time of political and social contestation in Iran and is thus quite distinct from discourses engendered in Saudi Arabia, which during this period rather witnessed a rigid interpretation of Wahhabi orthodoxy.<sup>5</sup> It has been well-documented how in Iranian cinema, the institutionalization of modesty led to techniques such as editing, framing and extreme close-ups, and their combination, to be employed so as to not obstruct the realism and narrative of the *mise-en-scène*.<sup>6</sup> As Naficy explains, the institutionalization of *veiling* and censorship regulations in Iranian cinema 'resulted in an unrealistic and distorted representation of women,' such that 'film-makers developed clever methods of using framing, composition and lighting to both mask and reveal.'<sup>7</sup> The analysis that follows explores the ways in which shampoo advertisements produced for Saudi Arabian Television employ a similar vocabulary of techniques to introduce and maintain codes of modesty in the construction of the *Muslim female subject* on screen.



I focus on the advertising of three shampoo brands – *Pantene*, *Head and Shoulders* and *Pert Plus* (2004) – which each witness a classic use of the notion of *glocalization* in their construction. In Saudi Arabia, the global shampoo companies address a market where the visibility of woman without the *veil* is not permitted, adapting their vision of shampoo advertising accordingly.<sup>8</sup> Whilst this may seem straightforward, the complexity lies in the extent to which women's hair is considered 'unrepresentable' in practice, and the paradoxes inherent in presenting the *veil* on screen while still demonstrating the product's beneficial effect. In consequence, a relationship must be formed between the *Muslim female subject*, hair and existing codes of modesty. I examine the extent to which the *veil*, a visual signifier of modesty, is both upheld and evaded in the construction of the *Muslim female subject*, exploring the intricate and multivalent ways in which different brand advertisements negotiate the mobility of the *veil* on screen. I examine the manner in which the evasion of the *veil* is here executed in a comparative analysis between three brands that makes reference to nine advertisements, four by *Pantene*, two by *Pert Plus* and three by *Head and Shoulders*. Key shot references are incorporated within this text; however, a complete shot-by-shot presentation of each advertisement can be found at the end of this chapter.

In an interview I conducted with the Director of Saudi Arabian Television, Dr. Suleiman Al-Aidi, it was stressed that Saudi Arabian Television is inextricably linked to the dissemination of Islamic national discourse, with this relationship most emphatically exemplified by the fact that it is broadcast from the two holy shrines of Makkah and Medina.<sup>9</sup> My analysis shall engage with this observation, where I first



interrogate the extent to which shampoo advertisements demand the *veil*'s elimination on screen, and whether the symbol of the *veil* possesses ideological connotations that stand as an impediment to the messages that shampoo advertisements construct. I examine the narratives offered by the nine advertisements to assess how both the ideological systems of three shampoo brands and the mobility of the *veil* on screen relate to the ideological vision of Saudi Arabian Television.

The first narrative series of the *Pantene* advertisement is constructed around the woman's dissatisfaction with her hair (P.1.1-19), and is interrupted by an excerpt on how Pantene shampoo and conditioner can improve its quality (P.1.20-34). The final series of shots reveals the beneficial effect (P.1.49-64) and the woman's satisfaction after using the product (P.1.77-80). Her sentiments throughout are presented in close-up shots of her facial expressions, with her hair captured separately in different shots. This stylistic technique is necessary in as far as codes of modesty are concerned. Montage and the separation of the elements 'woman' and 'hair' become the only means of capturing the woman's relationship to her hair and, ultimately, the construction of the narrative itself. From this formula we are able to deduce that both woman and hair are 'representable' as long as they are divorced from each other within the frame (refer to Figure 5.1.1).

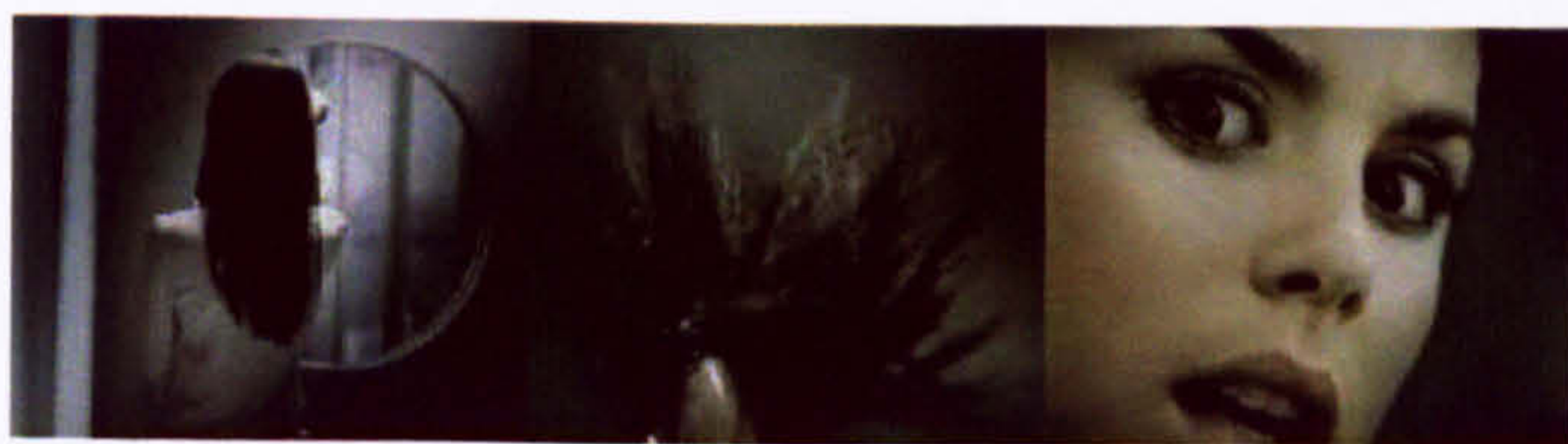


Figure 5.1.1: *Pantene I* (2004)



The dialectical relationship between woman and hair raises questions relating to the concept of *veiling* and interrogates the element that is ostensibly being concealed. Since hair is visible, it is possible to argue that it does not disrupt the modesty codes appertaining to advertising, providing it is captured in isolation (P.1.4-6, 20-1, 37-54). Further, the condition that the woman appears without a *veil* is dependent upon her hair not being visible, hence the shots in extreme close-up (P.1.7-9, 17-9, 55, 77-80). The shots that do reveal the combination of woman and hair within the same frame do not reveal her face as she has her back to the camera (P.1.1-3, 10-4, 49-54, 56-64). Crucially, this demonstrates that the element deemed 'unrepresentable' is woman's face *combined* with her hair.

Whilst shampoo advertising could be seen to demand the representation of woman without the *veil*, the separated elements function as an alternative means of achieving this effect; the chain of images become dependent upon each other in the process of constructing the overall representation. It is through the combination of montage and framing, where the cut between shots enables a division between the face and hair, that the evasion of the *veil* is here manifest, such that codes of modesty are then established within the series. Modesty is maintained in contradiction to the established representation, as the *Muslim female subject* 'in parts' resists the transgression that her singular form would possess. In other words, with modesty embodied between the frames, the fragmentation of the *Muslim female subject* through the separation of shots and then their collision, provides a platform for the evasion of the *veil* to take place, that is, the construction of an 'accepted'



representation of the *Muslim female subject* without the *veil*. The method of fragmentation allows for the combination of two opposing elements and justifies a paradox in a way that a single image is unable to encapsulate; the 'unrepresentable' is suggested through the juxtaposition of allowed elements. The mobility of the *veil* in this instance recalls Shahriar's *Daughters of the Sun*, discussed in Chapter Three, where the elements hair and *Muslim female subject* are divorced in separate shots as the protagonist has her head shaved. Whilst in this film the *veil* is evaded through the use of the shaved head, here it is executed through the stylistic technique of montage.

A media executive from the advertising agency Starcom explains how regulations concerning the representation of the *Muslim female subject* in advertisements produced for Saudi Arabian Television are distinguished from those on other Arab satellite channels:

On Saudi Arabia TV and Al Majd TV, you cannot show advertisements that have the face and hair of the woman showing at the same time. From the front, you can show a close-up of the face or the woman veiled ... There should be no implication of seduction and the body should be covered. Usually, a storyboard is submitted to Saudi Arabian Stations in Arabic with pictures drawn as cartoons. The station reports back asking for amendments or with the go ahead. The above is only for Saudi stations. Satellite stations like MBC, Dubai Sat, LBC, Melody and Mazzika accept advertisements where women are not covered and have hair showing. Advertisements considered to be 'too liberal' (women in swimsuits, bikinis and too much flesh) are sometimes rejected by stations which are on the conservative side, like MBC, but are approved by the more liberal stations, such as the music stations.<sup>10</sup>



The censorship rules here outlined confirm that the elements face and hair can be represented, albeit only in isolation, thereby necessitating the fragmentation of the *Muslim female subject*, as witnessed in the first narrative series of *Pantene*. However, whilst the *Muslim female subject* is both fragmented and constructed through a sequence of shots, interestingly the shots themselves possess an independent significance in the overall construction of the *Muslim female subject*.

To interrogate this further, I want to return to one of the first film theorists of editing and the film image, Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein. In his controversial formula, Eisenstein defines montage, or what he terms ‘the dramatic principle,’ as ‘an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots – shots even opposite to one another,’ explaining that the shot is ‘by no means an element of montage’ but rather ‘a montage cell’ or ‘molecule.’<sup>11</sup> He identifies ‘three different phases of one homogenous task of expression’:

*Conflict within a thesis* (an abstract idea) – *formulates* itself in the dialectics of the sub-title – *forms* itself spatially in the conflict within the shot – and *explodes* with increasing intensity in montage-conflict among the separate shots.<sup>12</sup>

In as far as the construction of the *Muslim female subject* is concerned, ‘conflict’ is witnessed in terms of the shot itself and what it eventually comes to signify in the process of shot-montage. If the complete image of the *Muslim female subject* is comprised of separate representations of face and hair, the shots oppose each other conceptually since they embody the impossibility of their existing simultaneously



within the same shot. Their combination, therefore, translates into what Eisenstein terms 'montage-conflict,' since 'the idea' of the *Muslim female subject* 'arises from the collision of shots,' which in this case are shots that may be considered 'opposite to one another.'<sup>13</sup> Thus, the *Muslim female subject* is not created through an alignment of shots but rather through the *conflict* of shots in 'one homogenous task of expression,' namely, a woman with hair.

Eisenstein further explains that, 'the concept of the moving (time-consuming) image arises from the superimposition – or counterpoint – of two differing immobile images.'<sup>14</sup> The 'dialectical development' of the montage sequence, he writes, derives from a '*moving fragment of montage*' and an '*artificially produced image of motion*.'<sup>15</sup> A similar device is apparent in what he terms 'pictorial symbolism,' which is made up of the calculation of the length of each shot and the superimposition of shots in the construction of the moving image.<sup>16</sup>

This contention informs the presentation of the evasion of the *veil* on screen: the superimposition of a series of shots depicting hair before and after a shot framing a woman's face materializes in the impression that the woman is moving her hair (shots P.1.49-54, P.1.55, P.1.56-64). In the first half of the series, the shot or 'fragment' embodies this movement, manifested in the way in which the woman unties her hair and then in its movement within the frame (P.1.49-54). Its superimposition against the woman's framed face (P.1.55), and the consistency of the blue backdrop within the frame, combine to produce the impression of a woman moving her hair (refer to Figure 5.1.2).





Figure 5.1.2: *Pantene I* (2004)

In the second half of the series, the superimposition of shots (P.1.56-64) does not necessarily contribute directly to the construction of the *Muslim female subject* moving her hair, since both her clothes and the backdrops within the frame change in colour (P.1.56-8 and P.1.59-64). Hair, nevertheless, is continuously in motion within each shot of the series, which, whilst foregrounding the concept of hair in motion, reinforces the independence of the shot itself within the sequence of shot-montage (refer to figure 5.1.3).



Figure 5.1.3: *Pantene I* (2004)

Having demonstrated the way in which modesty codes are both established and maintained within the series of shot-montage, what role does the *veil* play in relation to the construction of the *Muslim female subject*? The element that the *veil* conceals is hair *in relation to* woman and, whilst hair is allowed to be represented, albeit in isolation, splitting the image of a woman *with* hair into a woman *and* hair provides a platform for the concept of *veiling* to take place within the series. With the technique



of montage constructing the *Muslim female subject* without the *veil*, namely through the collision of independent shots, the process of *veiling*, as with the movement of hair, is primarily manifested within the shot itself. Eisenstein explains to this effect that a montage-piece does not exist as a single unit and functions simply as 'information,' where, in relation to the 'action' as a whole, each fragment piece is 'almost abstract.'<sup>17</sup>

The repetition of the shots of black hair contribute to the series, in their abstraction, in as far as they act as 'information.' Graphics illustrating Pantene's beneficial effects penetrating the woman's hair in close-up (P.1.37-48) and the repetition of black hair in subsequent shots (P.1.53-4, P.1.56-8, P.1.62) allude to the *veil*, specifically through bold reinforcement of the colour black. The contiguity of images of hair and woman create an abstract representation of the *Muslim female subject* without the *veil*, through a process of denotation; connotatively, the colour black and the movement of hair act as referents to the *veil*, herein creating an 'impression' of *veiling* while avoiding the need to represent the *veil* itself.

In another advertisement for *Pantene*, a woman wears a black wig and discards it in an act of casting off her imperfections in favour of the healthy hair she is about to have after using the shampoo (P.2.38-42, P.2.45-50) (refer to Figure 5.1.4). The act of removing the wig alludes to the removal of the *veil* (P.2.38-42); in shots P.2.45-50 it appears within the frame as though the woman is throwing a *veil* into the distance. In this portrayal, as in the *Pantene* advertisement discussed previously, hair is



bestowed with a *veil*-like quality, particularly evident in the closing sequence in the shots P.2.72-4.



Figure 5.1.4: *Pantene 2* (2004)

In terms of the conceptual aim of montage sequences, Eisenstein further presents the term ‘intellectual dynamization,’ associated with the intellectual aim of the sequence as opposed to its physiological effect.<sup>18</sup> He defines this as the conflict between ‘concept’ and ‘symbolization,’ where the achievement of ‘intellectual resolution’ is manifested in the conflict between the ‘preconception’ and ‘*a gradual discrediting of it in purposeful steps.*’<sup>19</sup>

Contiguity constructs the *Muslim female subject* as woman with hair through the maintenance of its denotative significance; connotation is then expressed through the independence of the shot and its allusion to the *veil* within the process of conflict-montage. While the overall concept of the sequence is that of a woman without a *veil*, symbolically the montage-pieces ‘*veil*’ her face between the shots. ‘Conflict’ therefore stands between the concept of the *Muslim female subject* without the *veil* and her symbolic *veiling*. The ‘preconception’ of presenting the *Muslim female*



*subject* with hair is built through the ‘discrediting’ of the concept in the ‘steps’ that then appear to ‘veil’ her. *Veiling* therefore takes place in the process of conflict-montage through contiguity and specifically in the connotation of the shot and its impact within the sequence. Significantly, the shot of the face, independently and out of the context of montage, further presents the viewer with the notion of *veiling*, namely in the way in which framing plays a part in the advertisements.

In both *Pantene* advertisements, the various shots that do reveal the woman’s face consistently use the technique of extreme close-up (P.1.7-9, P.1.17-9, P.1.55, P.1.77-80), (P.2.5-7, P.2.43-4, P.2.75-80). The woman’s face is isolated and her hair is not visible: hair in relation to woman is concealed. Whilst the technique of montage constructs the *Muslim female subject* without the *veil* through the denotation of signs and the superimposition of shots, the use of extreme close-up constructs the *Muslim female subject*, with the outline of the frame adopting the position of a *veil* (refer to Figure 5.1.5). Thus, within the sequences the *Muslim female subject* is both without the *veil* and *veiled*. Montage establishes modesty codes in relation to the formula of the *Muslim female subject* without the *veil*. Allusion to the *veil* through the colour black and the technique of framing maintain this establishment such that, when the *Muslim female subject* is presented, she appears *veiled*. The transference of the *veil*, in this instance, is executed in the way in which the *Muslim female subject* appears without the material *veil*, yet the way that her face is framed operates as a manipulated *veil*.





Figure 5.1.5: *Pantene 2* (2004)

An intriguing exception to the enforced separation of woman and hair is evident in a third advertisement for *Pantene*, where woman and hair do appear within the same frame (P.3.28-33, P.3.47-52) (refer to Figure 5.1.6). In these shots, however, both elements continue to remain separate even though they are presented within the same shot. Hair is isolated with woman in the backdrop to present the breakage of a single hair before and after the application of the product. In an advertisement by *Head and Shoulders*, the elements woman's hair and woman's face are similarly combined within the frame through the separation of the two entities (H.S.3.50-5). Here, the isolated face appears in the same shot as the presentation of a woman showing her hair with her back to the camera. The repeated paradigm of the woman and hair foregrounds the impossibility of their combination; their separation within the frame, however, reinforces the dialectical relationship between face and hair.



Figure 5.1.6: *Pantene 3* (2004) ; *Head and Shoulders 3*(2004)



In 'Sexuality for Sale,' Janice Winship examines an advertisement for *Guinness*, where she explains:

The ad is surreal, its surrealism constructed by the camera: a close-up shot obscures the shape and dimensions of the face, merging it into the foam of the Guinness, so that the vivid, glossy, red lips stand out above the flattened, labelled glass of dark Guinness. It is a condensation involving *absence* and *contradiction*, which 'Ladylike – Guinness' *denies* but also demands that we necessarily decipher.<sup>20</sup>

Winship argues that in relation to the signifying chain 'we move from the "inside" to the "outside" of the ad; we "fill" the absences and recognize the contradictions.'<sup>21</sup> She continues, 'The absences concern "femininity" and "masculinity" which we *already know about*, which the ad presupposes and which are in contradiction with each other.'<sup>22</sup> She contends,

The one bit of woman, the vivid red lips, signifies the whole of 'femininity' (woman) through a metonymic relation – in that sense the 'lips' are 'ladylike.' But metaphorically their colour and texture and shape signify daring, excitement, sexuality, in contradiction to the sober connotations of 'ladylike'; 'masculinity,' in its difference from these red lips, is signified by the dark drink. We participate in a 'joke': the red lips are *not* 'ladylike,' although it says they are; Guinness it not ladylike either, but the ad dares the *impossible* and declares that it is.<sup>23</sup>

The signifying chain in the shampoo advertisements discussed similarly demands that we move from the inside to the outside to then fill the absences and recognize the contradictions of the *Muslim female subject* with and without the *veil*. However,



here the absences concern 'modesty' and 'immodesty,' which we also similarly '*already know about*, which the ad presupposes and which are in contradiction with each other.' Hair, like the 'vivid red lips,' stands as a metonym for woman and simultaneously, as argued, alludes to the *veil* through references to the colour black. Metaphorically, however, in its excessive presence and movement within the frame, hair signifies sexuality and by extension immodesty, namely in the way it contradicts the notion of modesty manifested in the construction of woman without hair. Thus, it is in its difference from the sexuality signified through hair that modesty is here located. As with the *Guinness* advertisement, we similarly participate in a 'joke,' for the isolated face does not directly signify Islamic modesty when decontextualized, but rather through the alignment of the elements hair and face. *Head and Shoulders* 'dares the *impossible* and declares it'; Islamic female modesty is engendered within the frame.

The dialectical relationship between hair and the *Muslim female subject* is made possible through the negation of the *Muslim female subject with* hair and the presentation of the *Muslim female subject and* hair. In the *Pantene* advertisement the juxtaposition of the *Muslim female subject* with and without the *veil* herein renders her a site in which modesty is manifested, namely in the ambiguity of her representation. The *veil*, however, is materially evaded in the advertisement, and the extent to which its impression is manipulated exists in as far as it subscribes to censorship regulations. The question thus arises: does the symbol of the *veil* possess ideological connotations that stand as an impediment to the messages that shampoo advertisements construct?



As mentioned, the centrality of Islamic national discourse in the ideological vision of Saudi Arabian Television is exemplified by the fact that it is broadcast from the two holy shrines of Makkah and Madīnah.<sup>24</sup> As Abdul Aziz Al-Magushi, Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper *Al-Riyadh*, remarks, Saudi Arabian Television is 'representative of the direction and orientation of the state and the society it exists within and which it aims to target.'<sup>25</sup> This, he explains, 'is achieved through a discursive and visual strategy which works in harmony with, responds to and supports the aforementioned direction and orientation [of society and the state].'<sup>26</sup>

In our interview, Dr. Suleiman Al-Aidi, the Director of the Saudi Arabian National Television stations, explained that Saudi Arabian Television 'possesses a policy which adheres to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and which in turn adheres to the teachings of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* (the reported sayings and deeds of the Prophet.)'<sup>27</sup> He states, 'any programmes which are aired or are produced by Saudi Arabian Television have a proselytizing message (*da'wah*), the foundation upon which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia itself was established.'<sup>28</sup> He continues,

Other channels also produce programmes with a similar message and there are television stations which actually specialize in them like [the Islamic satellite channel] Al-Majd and Sharjah TV... There is a lot of freedom in the way women appear without the Islamic *hijāb*, for example in stations like Al-Arabiyyah, Al-Jazeera and Al-Hurrah, and if they do use versions of the *hijāb*, they do not fulfil its purpose, that is to cover the hair and the adornments of woman ... Our message is an extension of Saudi Arabian values and principles as expressed with reference to our position within the GCC



[Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf]; we aim to reinforce our national identity, disseminate Islamic *da'wah*, and entertain Saudi Arabian audiences and others through our four different channels.<sup>29</sup>

Al-Aidi further comments on how Saudi Arabian Television distinguishes itself from other Islamic satellite channels in the region, namely Iqra and Al-Risala:

Iqra and Al-Risala are channels specializing in Islamic *da'wah* whilst Saudi Arabia Television is inherently religious since it broadcast from the holy sites of Makkah and Medina. The only thing that sets them apart from us is that they have more specialized output such as intensive *da'wah* programmes whereas in our case we consider everything as *da'wah*, such as broadcasting the call to prayer from Makkah, *fatwa* programmes and educational programmes for women. Also, the fact that women are dressed in Islamic dress and not just traditional dress refers to the way in which our programmes are considered as *da'wah*. Iqra and Al-Risala are specialized channels ... I do not agree with this kind of categorization, Islamic channel or so and so channel ... we have an Islamic mission which we carry out through our programmes under one motto: 'There is no God but Allāh, and Muhammad is his messenger.'<sup>30</sup>

With Al-Aidi explaining that Saudi Arabian National Television stations employ a policy which adheres to the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*, how are we to understand the evasion of the *veil* in light of this particular contention? Does the evasion of the material *veil* not operate against the aims and objectives of Saudi Arabian Television? In other words, given that all programmes aired and produced by Saudi Arabian Television have a proselytizing message and an objective to reinforce Islamic national identity, how does the construction of the *Muslim female subject*



and the evasion of the *veil* in shampoo advertising relate to the ideological agenda of Saudi Arabian Television?

In the advertisements produced for *Pantene* the *veil* continues to be absent, suggesting that the notion of covering poses a contradiction to shampoo advertising as seen by the brand (refer to Figure 5.1.7). This is witnessed in the way the woman covers the split ends of her hair with her jacket before using the product (P.1.11-4), a scenario repeated in another *Pantene* advertisement (P.4.17-20). The converse effect, ‘revealing,’ is likewise repeated, as it was with the removal of the wig (P.2.38-42), only now the woman removes her jacket after having used the product (P.4.52-62).



Figure 5.1.7: *Pantene 4* (2004)

The use of the concept of ‘covering’ in relation to hair before the application of the product and ‘revealing’ afterwards sheds light on *Pantene*’s ideological structures in as far as *veiling* and its relation to shampoo advertising is concerned. The removal of the wig or the jacket suggests the shedding of damaged hair and the exposure of healthy hair; while a literal reference to the removal of the *veil* is not made, the implication is that damaged hair should be covered and healthy hair should be seen. In being associated with the shedding of damaged hair, the act of removal is thus



aligned with the positive effects that the product promises and, consequently, the object that is discarded with the negative.

Similar references occur in the advertisements produced for *Pert Plus*, set in a domestic scene between a man and a woman (refer to Figure 5.1.8). A series of shots reveal a woman's hands picking up a scarf (P.P.1.29-31), interrupted by a shot of the man looking at her (P.P.1.32-3) then a shot of her tying the scarf around her neck with her back to the camera (P.P.1.34-9). It continues with a series of shots that introduce the product, including one of a green bottle *unveiled* by a piece of cloth (P.P.1.40-5). There follows a shot of the suitcase referenced in the opening sequence (P.P.1.60-1), then a series of the woman's hair in motion after having used the product (P.P.1.62-9). The closing sequence reintroduces the domestic scene with a shot of the woman entering a room (P.P.1.70), followed by a shot of her hand picking up the dress that was in the suitcase (P.P.1.71-73). The advertisement concludes with an image of bottles of Pert Plus (P.P.1.80).



Figure 5.1.8: *Pert Plus 1* (2004)



The removal of the *veil* is here manifested in the *unveiling* of the shampoo bottle by a piece of grey cloth (P.P.1.40-5) and is thus used in relation to the object being advertised as opposed to the *Muslim female subject*. The *veil* is alluded to elsewhere within the advertisement in the way in which fabric, that is the scarf and the dress, is framed such that the nature of the garment is ambiguous. However, it continues to be absent: the scarf is not used to *veil* the woman but rather is tied around her neck.

In another advertisement by *Pert Plus*, a domestic *mise-en-scène* is again employed, yet this time a woman wearing the *shailah* (head *veil*) and '*abāyah*' is represented. A similar reference to *unveiling* occurs in a shot that reveals an orange scarf moving to expose a tableau of shampoo ingredients against a green background (refer to Figure 5.1.9) (P.P.2.52-6). The series continues with the familiar motif of the product's beneficial effects penetrating the woman's hair (P.P.2.57-69), followed by a medium close-up of her walking with her back to the camera (P.P.2.70-5). It ends with a shot of a single bottle of Pert Plus shampoo against a green backdrop (P.P.2.76-8) and a final shot of a group of shampoo bottles against the orange scarf (P.P.2.79-80). The recurrence of the colours green and orange introduced previously in the *unveiling* sequence (P.P.2.52-6) reinforce the relationship between *unveiling* and *Pert Plus*. Significantly, both the process of *unveiling* and the object *unveiled* in the shots described above are positioned before and after two series of shots in which hair is depicted (P.P.2.57-69, P.P.2.70-5). Whilst the elements that are directly referred to in the process of *unveiling* are the ingredients of Pert Plus and the bottle of Pert Plus,



the inclusion of shots of hair within this sequence elide the concept of *unveiling* Pert Plus shampoo with the *unveiling* of hair after using the product.



Figure 5.1.9: *Pert Plus 2* (2004)

In this advertisement the removal of the *shailah* (head *veil*) is witnessed in the opening sequence as a woman enters the compound of the house (P.P.2.10-20), and then in the series when she is seen without the 'abāyah (P.P.2.27-8). The closing sequence does reveal the 'abāyah in a repeated scenario (P.P.2.70-5); however, the *veil* does not reappear in the advertisement as it did in the opening sequence (P.P.2.2-4), where its association with the *Muslim female subject* crucially is made before the product and its effects are introduced.

In the examples discussed at the beginning of this analysis, the construction of the *Muslim female subject* through montage and framing transcends the paradigm of *unveiling* in the evasion of the *veil* on screen (refer to Figure 5.1.1). In *Pantene*, however, the mobility of the *veil* (hair) through conflict montage inscribes the *veiling* paradigm, where the montage-pieces *veil* the woman's face between the shots (refer to Figure 5.1.2-3). Whilst it is the *veiling* paradigm that is inscribed in the construction the *Muslim female subject*, *unveiling* is emphatically alluded to in the



narratives of the advertisements. In other words, the mobility of the *veil* is executed in a symbolic *veiling*, yet the paradigm of *unveiling* is nonetheless thematically and visually encapsulated in the *Pantene* advertisements (refer to Figure 5.1.4 and 5.1.7). This is illustrated by the black wig (*veil*) that is removed and thrown into the distance (P.2.38-42, P.2.45-50) and the association of ‘revealing’ with the product’s positive effects, whilst ‘covering’ is aligned with the negative (split ends).

*Pert Plus* also privileges the theme of *unveiling* in its narratives, for the paradigm of *unveiling* is visually manifest in the *unveiling* of the product (P.P.1.40-5, P.P.2.52-6), which is then extended to the *Muslim female subject* in its positioning before and after shots of hair (P.P.2.57-69, P.P.2.70-5). Whilst the *veil* continues to be absent in the *Pantene* advertisements, and merely alluded to through the scarf in *Pert Plus*, a literal reference to it is made in the second advertisement for *Pert Plus* (refer to Figure 5.1.8-9). In this instance, however, the *shailah* is present only to be removed. Its introduction is followed by the act of *unveiling*, signifying positive beneficial effects at the end of the advertisement. Following this, how are we to understand the mobility of the *veil* within the context of shampoo advertising? With the *unveiling* paradigm privileged in these narratives, does reference to the *veil* in shampoo advertising in some sense demand its elimination?

An advertisement for *Head and Shoulders* foregrounds the *veil* as the camera pans into the image of a woman wearing the *hijāb* (H.S.1.1-4) (refer to Figure 5.1.10). The following scene reveals women covering their hair with *veils* and towels in a salon (H.S.1.8-15) and the camera zooms in to reveal dandruff on the shoulder of a



woman who has just removed her *hijāb* (H.S.1.16-21). This is interrupted with an excerpt on how Head and Shoulders can get rid of dandruff and generally improve the health of one's hair (H.S.1.22-71), followed by the repeated image of the woman wearing the *hijāb* (H.S.1.68-9). The advertisement ends with a series of shots in which the woman *veils* herself before turning to face the camera (H.S.1.72-80).

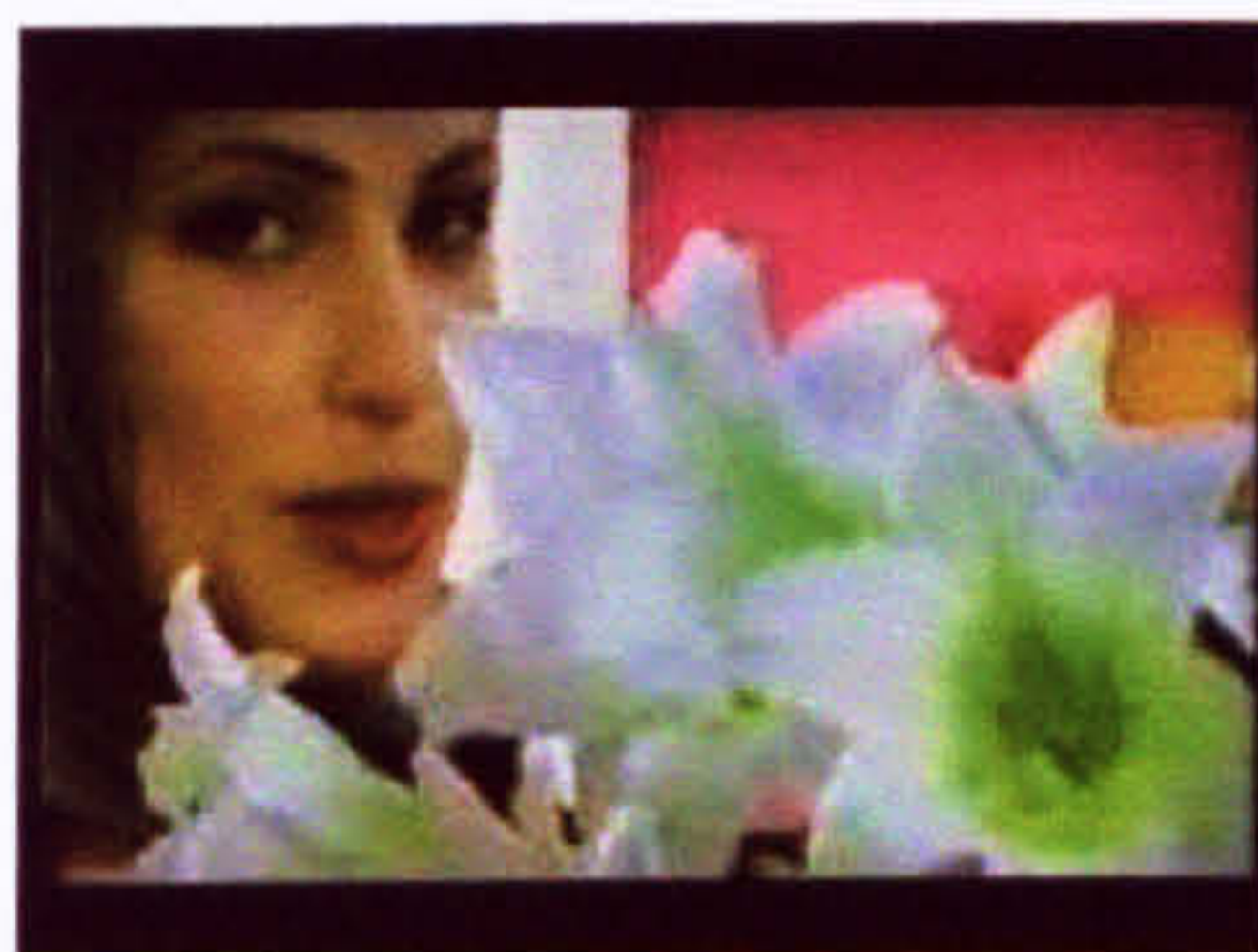


Figure 5.1.10: *Head and Shoulders 1*(2004)

In this advertisement, through continual visual reference to women in coloured *hijābs*, *Head and Shoulders* presents *veiling* as no impediment to the purpose of shampoo advertising (H.S.1.4, H.S.12-3, H.S.68-9, H.S.72-80). It presents the opposite effect to *Pert Plus*, with the *veil* being removed in the opening sequence and reinstated at the end (H.S.1.72-5). The removal of the *veil* here carries a negative connotation, entailing the embarrassing exposure of dandruff on the woman's shoulder (H.S.1.16-21) (refer to Figure 5.1.11). *Veiling* thus adopts a positive connotation as a tool in the covering of dandruff, expressly contrasting the way the notion of 'covering,' manifested in the woman hiding her split ends behind her jacket, assumes a negative connotation in *Pantene* (P.1.10). The mobility of the *veil* in this instance reveals that *veiling* and the notion of 'covering' are promoted by *Head and Shoulders* in a much less equivocal manner than in the other advertisements discussed previously.



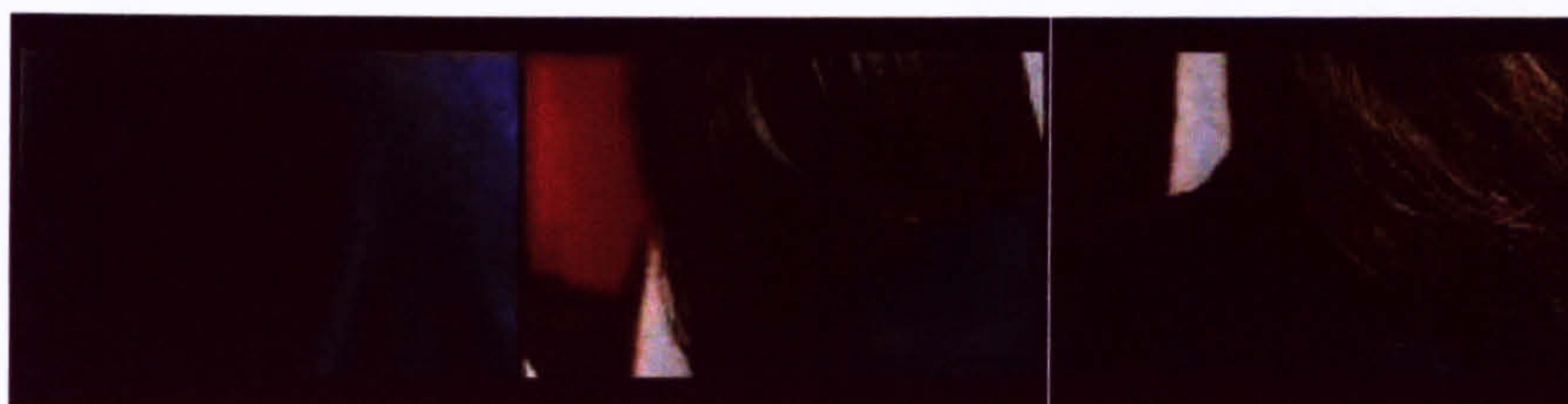


Figure 5.1.11: *Head and Shoulders 1* (2004)

The final series of *Head and Shoulders* reveals an instance of the *Muslim female subject* with and without the *veil* (H.S.1.72-80). In these shots the woman is presented showing her hair with her back to the camera; she then *veils* herself before turning around to face the camera with her hair concealed (refer to Figure 5.1.12). The dialectical relationship between hair and face is here manifested in the act of *veiling*. As has already been established, the ambiguity manifested within the dichotomous representation of the *Muslim female subject* with and without the *veil* sustains codes of modesty relating to the construction of the *Muslim female subject* on screen. This advertisement demonstrates that not only is the *veil* presented as no impediment to shampoo advertising but, furthermore, its mobility in the final shot illustrates the way in which *Head and Shoulders*' ideological system promotes the practice of *veiling* itself.



Figure 5.1.12: *Head and Shoulders 1* (2004)



In another advertisement for *Head and Shoulders*, hair is revealed when the protagonist shows her back to the camera (H.S.2.22-7, H.S.36-9, H.S.74-6). A woman in a blue *hijāb* appears within the frame and remains present as the protagonist removes her *hijāb* (H.S.2.22-7). Similarly, as the protagonist reveals her hair to the camera for the second time, she does so amongst a group of women who all wear the *hijāb* (H.S.2.36-41). From these interpolations we can deduce that, whilst the purpose of the advertisement necessitates the exposure of hair, *veiling* nonetheless continues to be foregrounded within these shots. Towards the end of the advertisement we see the woman standing in a desert with her back to the camera, hair exposed. Whilst the *veil* is not present within the frame, the shots that reveal hair are positioned between shots that show a woman wearing a *veil* (H.S.2.73-8). The advertisement concludes with an image of the woman who appears wearing the *veil*, which not only reinforces the practice of *veiling* within the advertisement but further substantiates the manner in which the *veil* in *Head and Shoulders* responds to the exposure of hair.



Figure 5.1.13: *Head and Shoulders 2* (2004)

The *Pert Plus* advertisements present one direct reference to the material *veil* and multiple allusions to it in shots presenting the dress and the scarf in the woman's hands. In *Pantene* the *veil* is physically absent throughout, yet alluded to through the use of the black wig and the repeated image of black *veil*-like hair. References to the *veil* in *Head and Shoulders*, however, do not merely *defer* to modesty codes as a



means of avoiding transgression in constructing the *Muslim female subject*, but rather *refer* to Islamic female modesty as seen through ideology.<sup>31</sup> This is manifested in the repetition of the coded message of the *hijāb*, which *Head and Shoulders* foregrounds, and which by extension renders the *muhajjabah* the signifier of the advertisement's system.<sup>32</sup> Here, references to the *hijāb* as the signifier of Islamic female modesty not only pertain to regulations controlling the representation of the *Muslim female subject* but also inscribe the policies and aims of Saudi Arabian Television, while preserving, in Al-Aidi's words, 'the Islamic identity of woman' on screen.

Crucially, the advertisement discussed above inscribes national discourse in its ideological system through reference to the '*abāyah*', which connotes national specificity. References to the '*abāyah*' alongside the *hijāb* and the promotion of *veiling* reveal how *Head and Shoulders* positions itself in line with Islamic national discourse. For example, in another advertisement for this brand, the *hijāb* and the '*abāyah*' are presented in the opening sequence (H.S.2.1). There follows a shot of the protagonist with a woman in a blue *hijāb* behind her (H.S.2.5), and another which shows her amongst three women wearing different coloured *hijābs* (H.S.2.9). Whilst in the previous advertisement the notion of an Islamic national discourse was manifest in the recurring presence of the *hijāb* and the '*abāyah*', in this case it is expressed within the same frame. Whilst the reference to *veiling* in *Pert Plus* is manifested in the '*abāyah*', thereby appealing to a local/regional audience through the inscription of national dress, *Head and Shoulders* presents it alongside the *hijāb* in various colours, herein evoking a more universal notion of *veiling*. This renders it



an appellation to a wider Islamic audience, with the inscription of national specificity through the *'abāyah* locating Saudi Arabia as the producer of Islamic national discourse. This latter observation can be seen to illustrate Al-Magushi's statement that Saudi Arabian Television employs 'a visual and discursive strategy' to support and respond to 'the direction and orientation of the state.'

In *Decoding Advertising*, Judith Williamson, drawing on Lévi-Strauss, explains that knowledge, which is both historical and specific, is a prerequisite in the process of connotation; the viewer draws references from ideological thought that already exist.<sup>33</sup> The *hijāb*, the *'abāyah* and the continual references to the act of *veiling* in the *Head and Shoulders* advertisement signify an ideology that promotes the *veiling* of women, unlike the *Pantene* advertisements, which evade its materiality. The former, therefore, not only becomes representative of Islamic national discourse in accordance with Saudi Arabian production, but its referent system functions in promoting an ideology, namely *da'wah*, in line with the product that is being advertised. Thus, *veiling* is drawn upon as a social discourse in the construction of the advertisement's ideological system.<sup>34</sup>

Williamson argues that the notion of differentiation in advertising plays a role in such cases, since a product becomes defined negatively in relation to other signs within the system.<sup>35</sup> She explains how the values of signs function in relation to each other, referring to Saussure's argument that,

When we say that these values correspond to concepts, it is understood that these concepts are purely differential, not positively defined by their content



but negatively defined by their relation with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is that they are what the others are not.<sup>36</sup>

It could be argued that *Head and Shoulders*, *Pantene* and *Pert Plus* identify themselves differently in as far as the implications of social discourse are concerned, since *Head and Shoulders* embraces the practice of *veiling* whilst the others continue to reject it. This differentiation therefore maintains the definition of the product in relation to what it is not; moreover, it implicates specific social groups within the market it addresses.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the 'pro-*veiling*' ideology manifested in *Head and Shoulders* aligns itself with the propagation of an 'Islamic female identity,' to which *Pantene* and *Pert Plus* remain indifferent.<sup>38</sup> Williamson argues that, 'you do not buy the product in order to *become* a part of the group it represents: you must feel that you already, naturally, belong to that group and *therefore* you will buy it.'<sup>39</sup> In this sense, *muhajjabahs* would not buy *Head and Shoulders* to become part of the 'pro-*veiling*' group it represents, but instead naturally belong to this specific group, since they *veil* and can therefore identify with the advertisement.<sup>40</sup> Thus, differentiation becomes *social* in as far as specific groups are represented and defined by the product, and *ideological* in the way in which they are implicated and therefore 'belong' to that product.<sup>41</sup> The *hijāb* in *Head and Shoulders* renders it an appellation to a specific group, namely *muhajjabahs*, whilst *Pantene*, on the other hand, addresses women who do not *veil*, maintaining codes of modesty whilst simultaneously evading the *veil*'s materiality.<sup>42</sup> In as far as social differentiation is concerned, Al-Aidi's contention that 'any programmes which are aired or are produced by Saudi Arabian Television have a proselytizing message (*da'wah*)' renders *Pert Plus* as presenting the most daring and certainly the most equivocal



conception of *veiling* since its advertisements incorporate the *veil*, and thereby women who *veil*, yet it concludes with its elimination. *Head and Shoulders*, by contrast, adheres to the ideological vision of Saudi Arabian Television, since constructions of the *Muslim female subject* are central to the practice of *veiling*, thus rendering its ideological system in accordance with the dissemination of *da'wah*.

The evasion of the *veil* is executed in the texts here discussed through framing and montage. The fragmentation of the *Muslim female subject* on screen demonstrates, as is the case with costume substitution and the use of the shaved head, that the evasion of the *veil* can occur outside the paradigm of *unveiling*. However, whilst the evasion of the *veil* in the construction of the *Muslim female subject* resists a literal reference to her *unveiling*, the mobility of the *veil* in the *Pantene* and *Pert Plus* narratives nonetheless continues to allude to the paradigm of *unveiling*. As a result of this analysis, an intriguing paradox is engendered in the evasion of the *veil* on screen, namely the presentation of the *veil's* evasion through the process of *veiling* itself. The first *Pantene* advertisement exemplifies this through attributing hair with a *veil*-like quality, such that *veiling* is then referenced between the frames. *Head and Shoulders*, however, presents an exaggerated manifestation of this paradox, for the evasion of the *veil* is here evinced through a literal and material reference to *veiling*. This is further underscored in the way that the symbolism of the *veil* is emphatically referenced in *Head and Shoulders* in contrast to the other brands discussed.

Whilst all the texts here examined comply with the codes of Islamic female modesty, in *Head and Shoulders*, however, constructions of the *Muslim female subject* are



produced in line with the promotion of Islamic national discourse. 'Immodest modesty,' therefore, encapsulates the paradox engendered between the evasion of the *veil* in shampoo advertising and the implementation and promotion of *veiling* by Saudi Arabian Television stations. My following discussion shall examine this relationship further in considering how the transference of the *veil* both adheres to and contests ideological constructions of the *Muslim female subject* as defined by religious clerics and the state.

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<sup>1</sup> Naficy (1999), p. 45 and Leaman, (2001) pp. 67–170 and pp. 187–92.

<sup>2</sup> Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989), pp. 9–10.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the seizure of the Great Mosque, see Tim Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (London and New York: Routledge 2006), pp. 68–113.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Niblock (2006), p. 85.

<sup>6</sup> To illustrate, Naficy provides an analysis of the strategies used in Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *The Silence* (1998) to convey eroticism within the confines of censorship. See Leaman (2001), p. 189.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> The advertisements I discuss were produced in 2004: *Pantene* and *Pert Plus* by C.S.S. and Grey Worldwide, and *Head and Shoulders* by Leo Burnett (Lebanon). They were distributed by Starcom (Lebanon) and Saatchi and Saatchi, (United Arab Emirates and Lebanon), transmitted on Saudi Arabian Television and the satellite networks MBC and ART. Information obtained from Saudi Arabian National Television, 2004. The brands in the advertisements I discuss are manufactured in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Dr Suleiman Al-Aidi, Director of Saudi Arabian Television, 3 June 2006, Al-Riyadh.

<sup>10</sup> Email exchange with Media executive, Sara Sayegh, P&G Cosmetics and Fragrances and Wella Media Buyer, Starcom, Dubai Media City, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 10 July 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1977), p. 49, p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>20</sup> Janice Winship, 'Sexuality for Sale,' in Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis, eds, *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Routledge, 1980), pp. 217–23, p. 222.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Dr Suleiman Al-Aidi, Director of Saudi Arabian Television, 3 June 2006, Al-Riyadh.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Dr Abdul Aziz, editor of *Al-Riyadh*, 4 June 2006, Al-Riyadh.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Dr Suleiman Al-Aidi, Director of Saudi Arabian Television, 3 June 2006, Al-Riyadh.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> This analysis was initiated by my reading of Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Williamson (1978), pp. 100–2.

<sup>34</sup> Drawing on Lévi-Strauss' concept of 'bricolage,' Williamson explains how ideological thought operates in relation to the structural patterns of advertising. Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 24–9.

<sup>38</sup> Williamson explains how 'advertisements appropriate the formal relations of pre-existing systems of differences. They use distinctions existing in social mythologies to create distinctions between products.' Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>40</sup> I am indebted to Williamson for her application of 'totemism' to advertising, particularly her observation that 'the more subtle level on which [advertising] works is that of "alreadyness," which is where "totemism" becomes a part of ideology: you do not simply buy the product in order to *become* a part of the group it represents: you must feel that you already, naturally, belong to that group and *therefore* you will buy it.' Ibid., pp. 46–7.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 47. I am indebted to Williamson in both my terminology and the appropriation of her argument in this context.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



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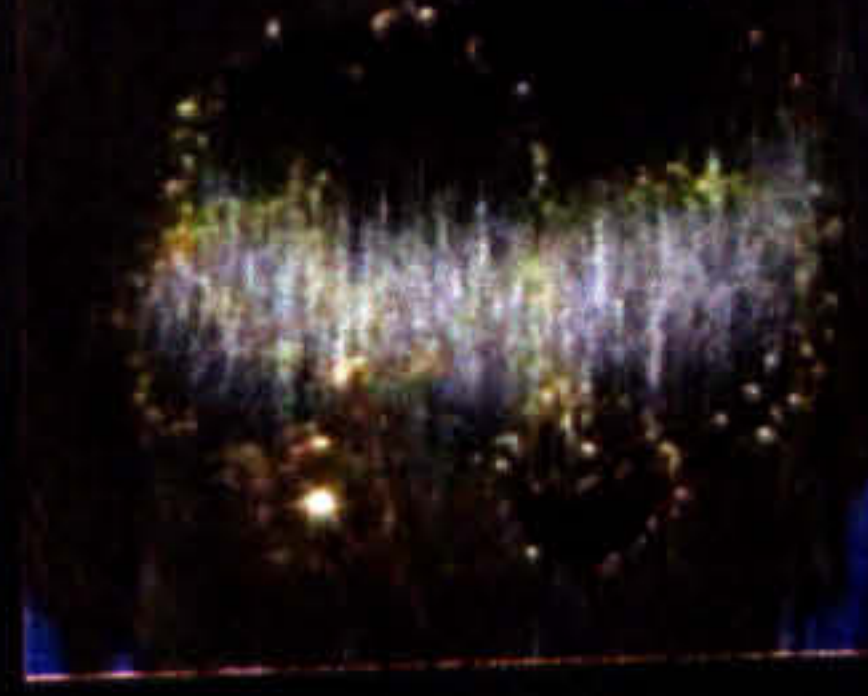
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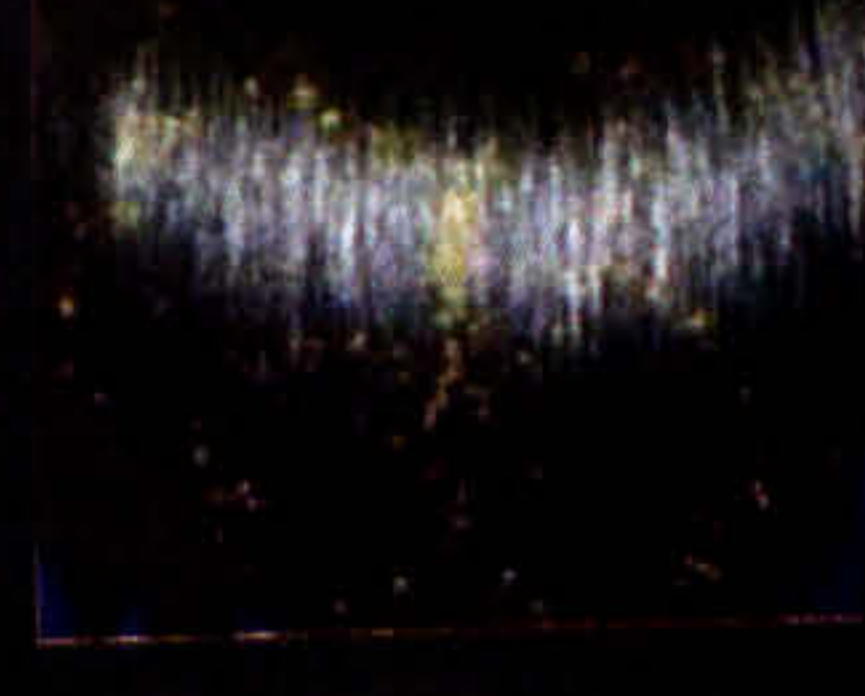
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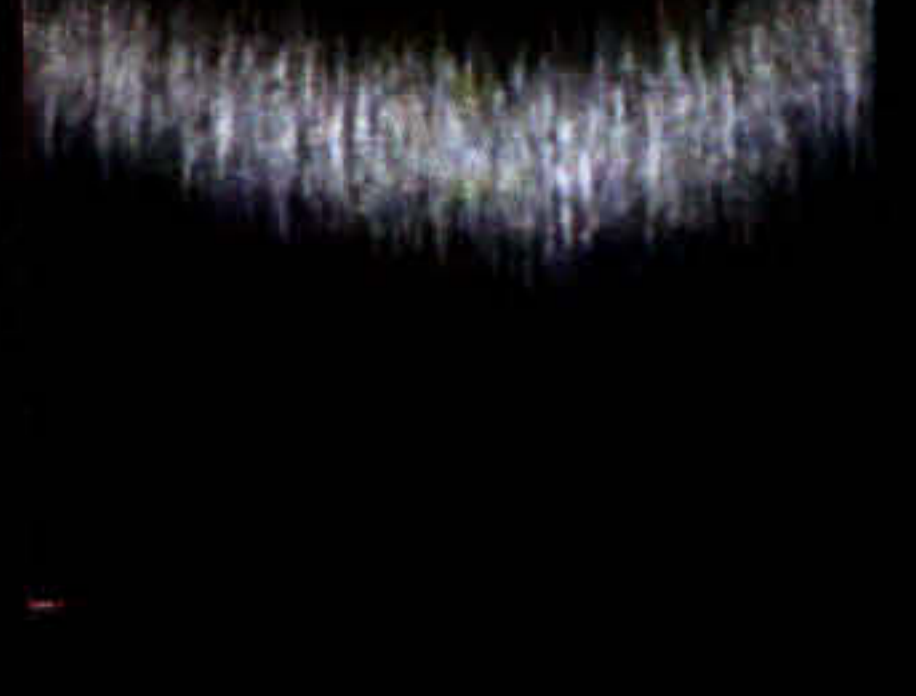
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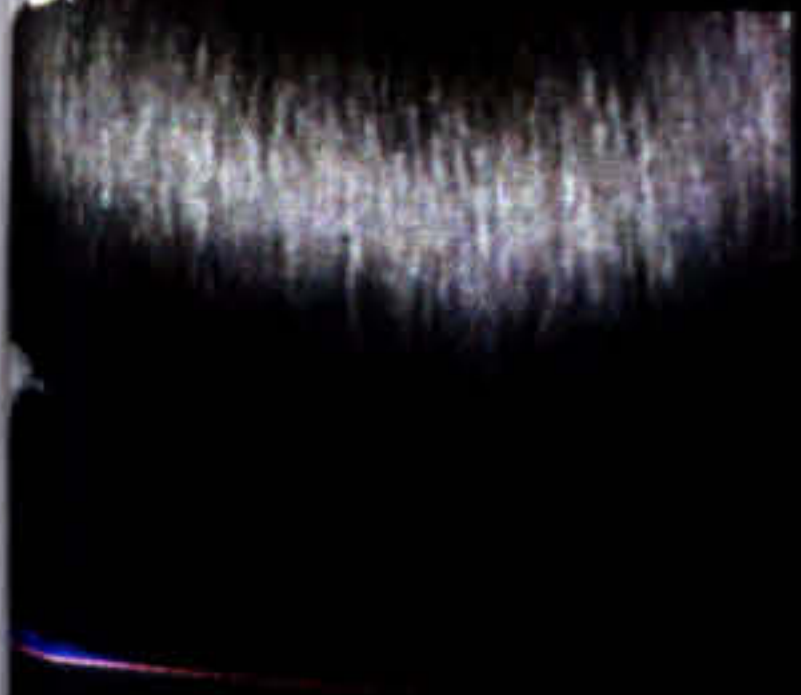
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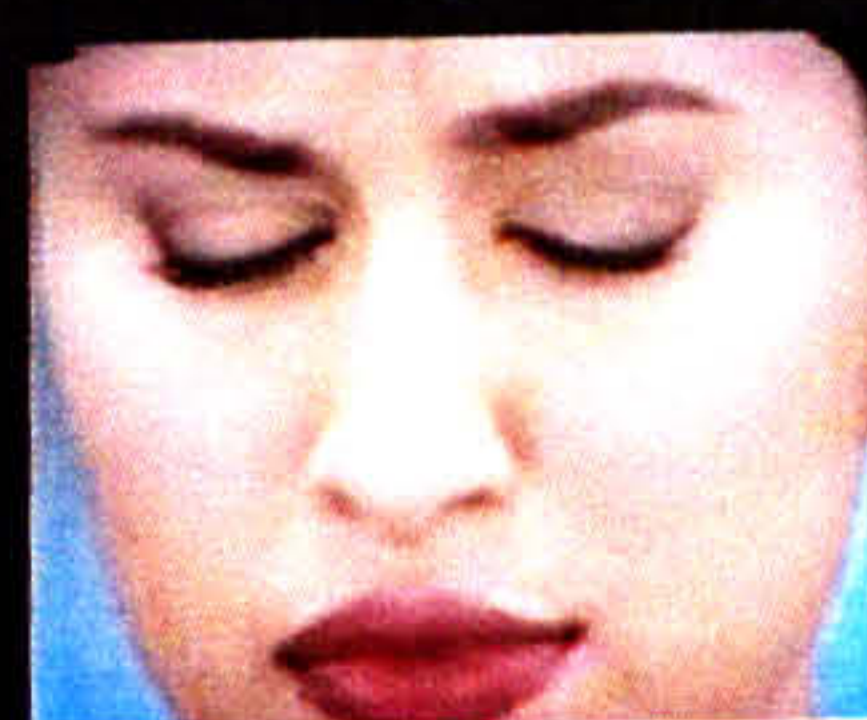
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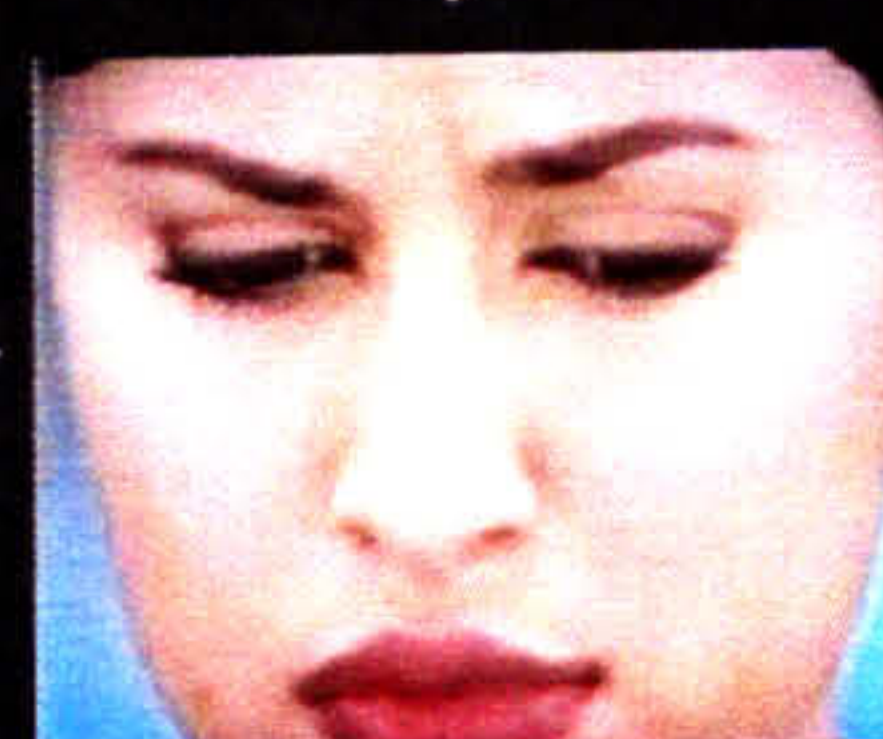
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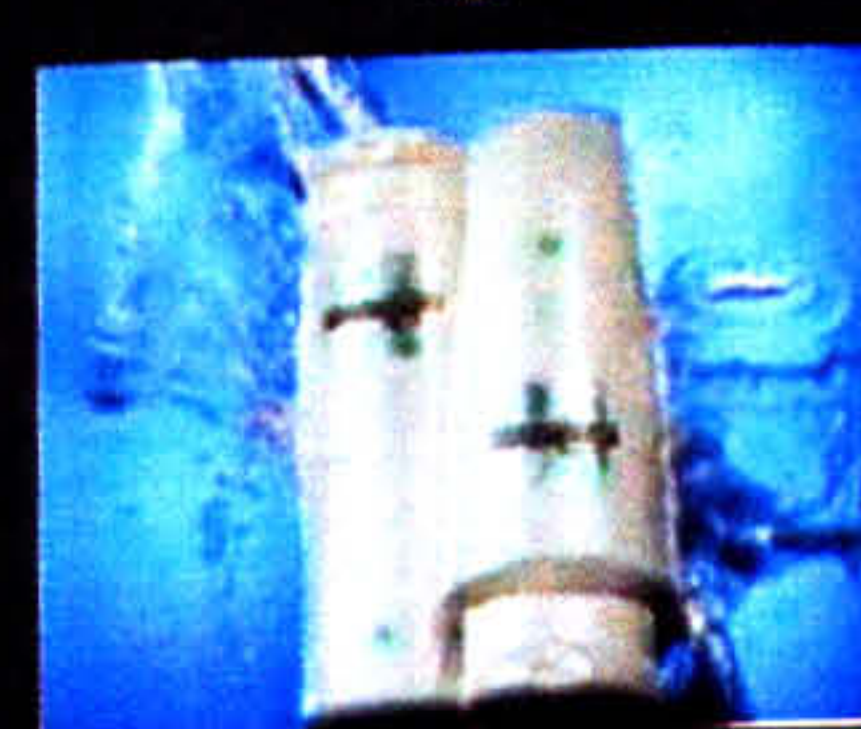
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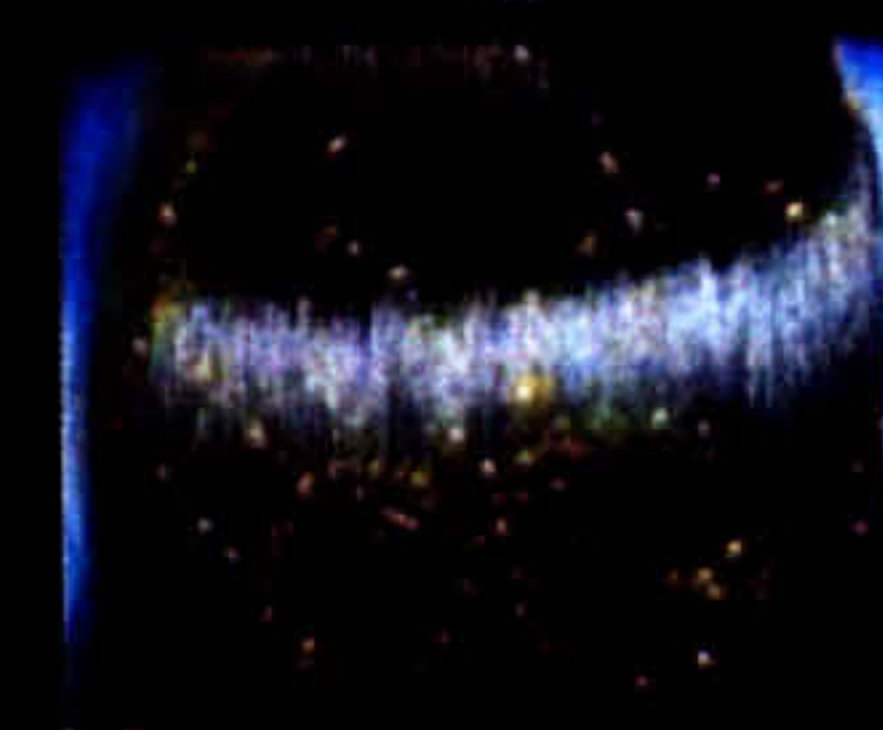
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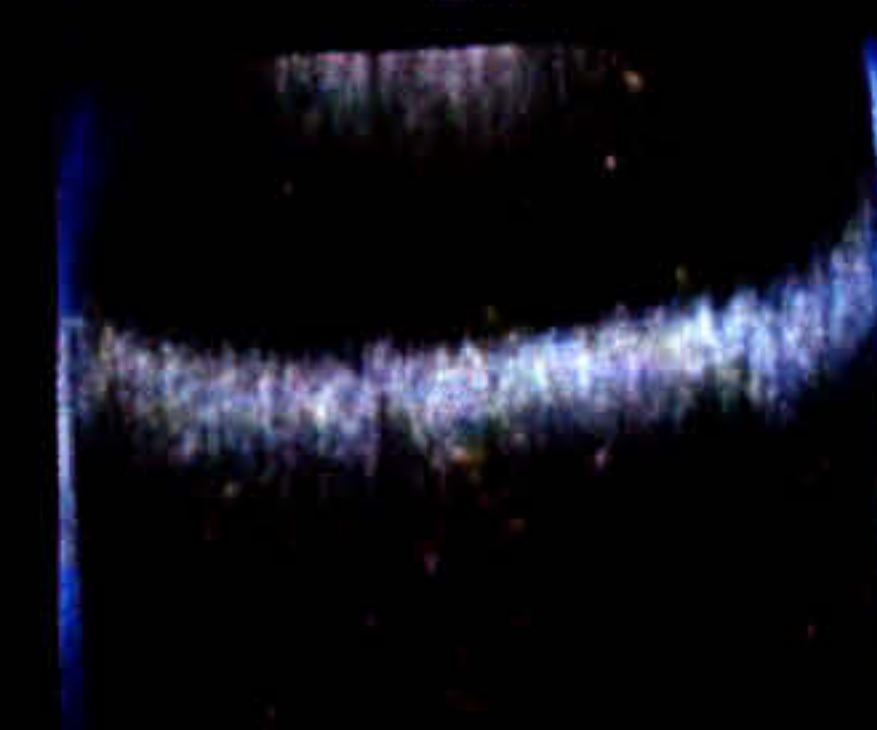
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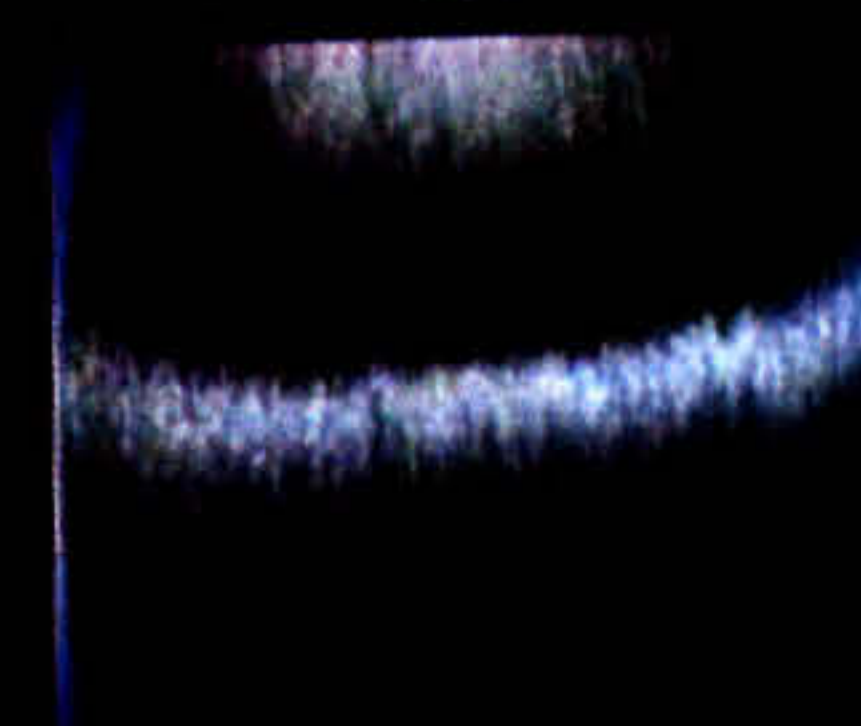
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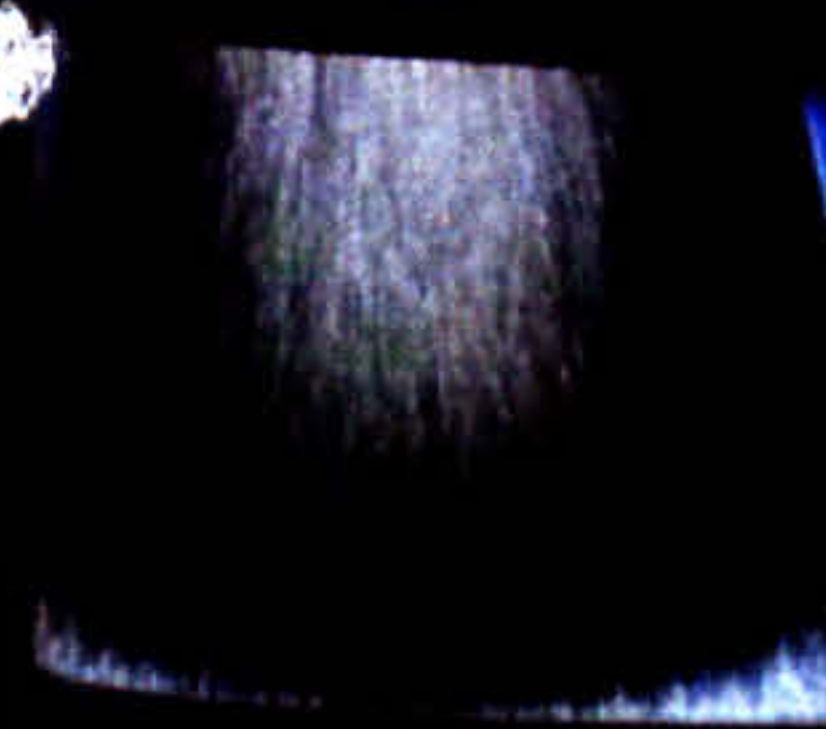
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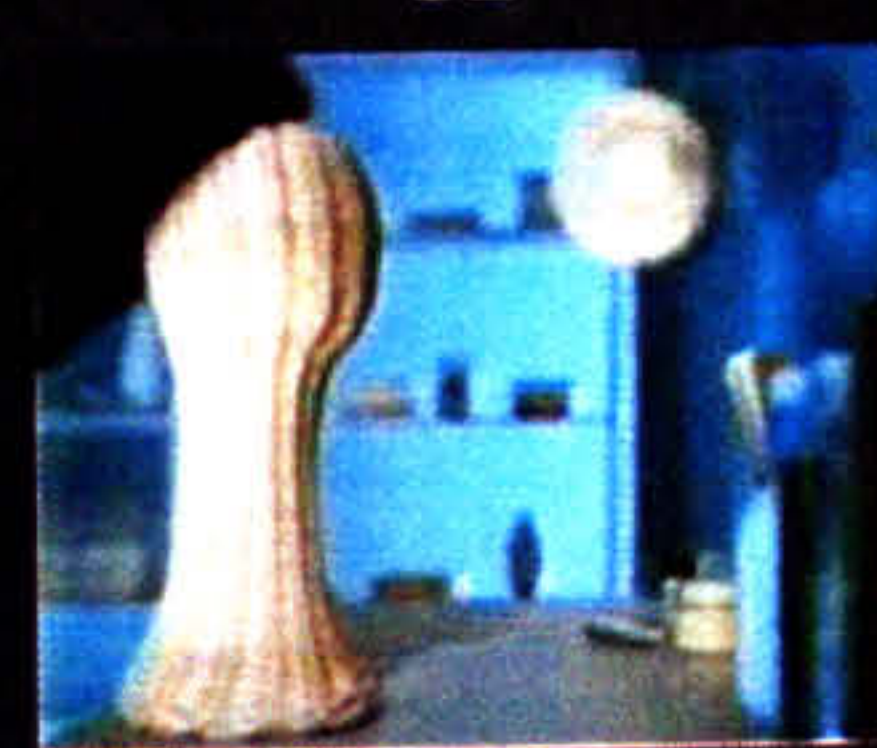
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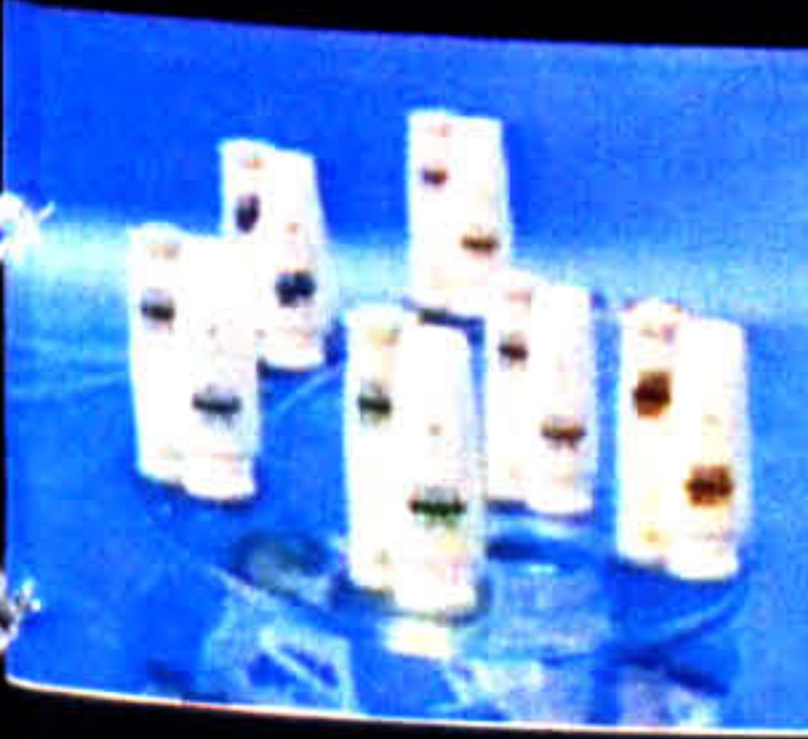
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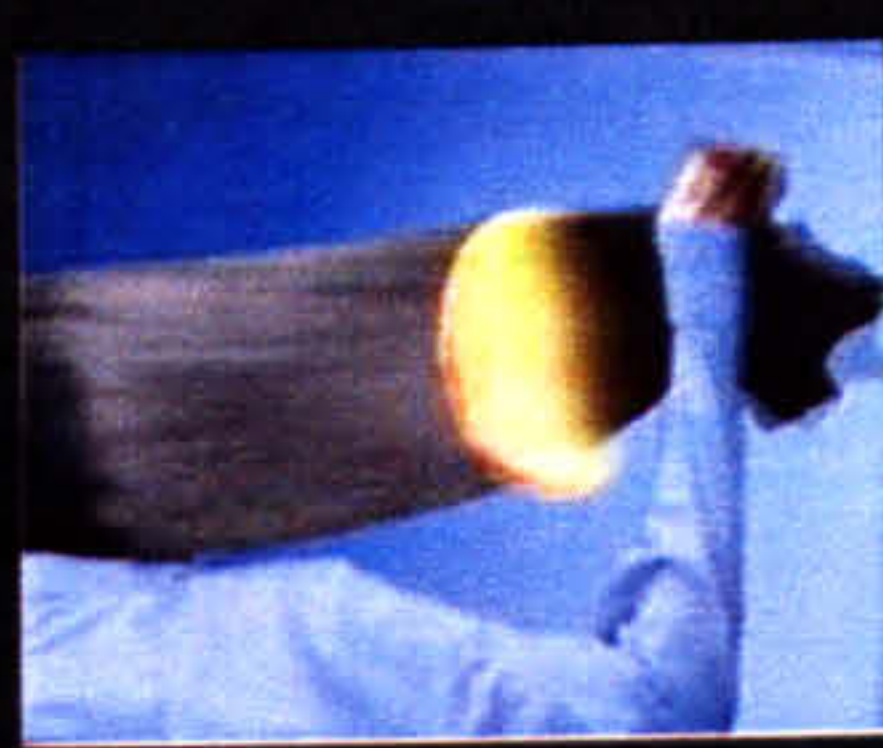




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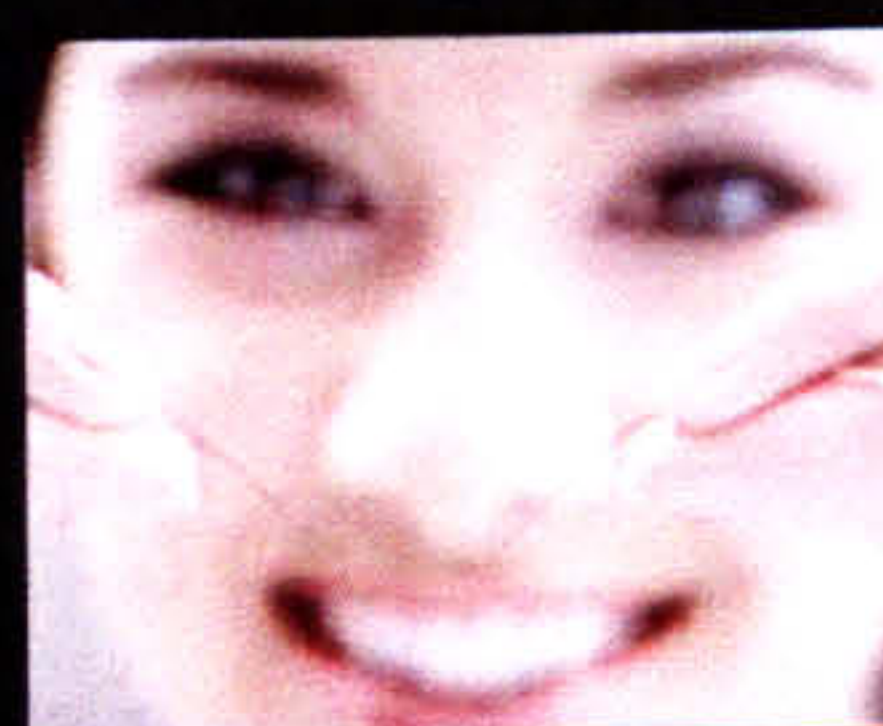
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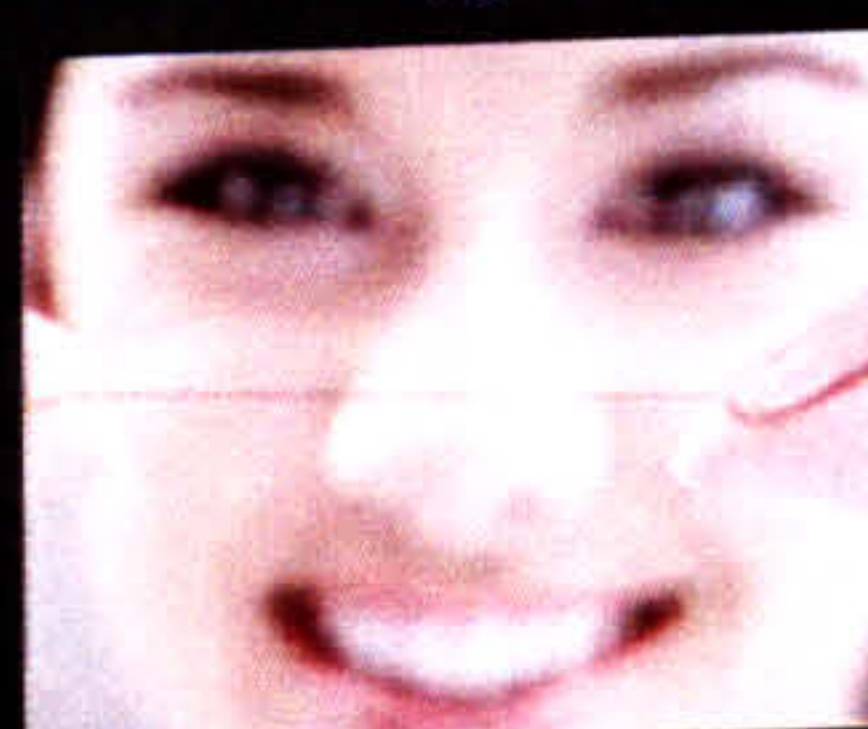
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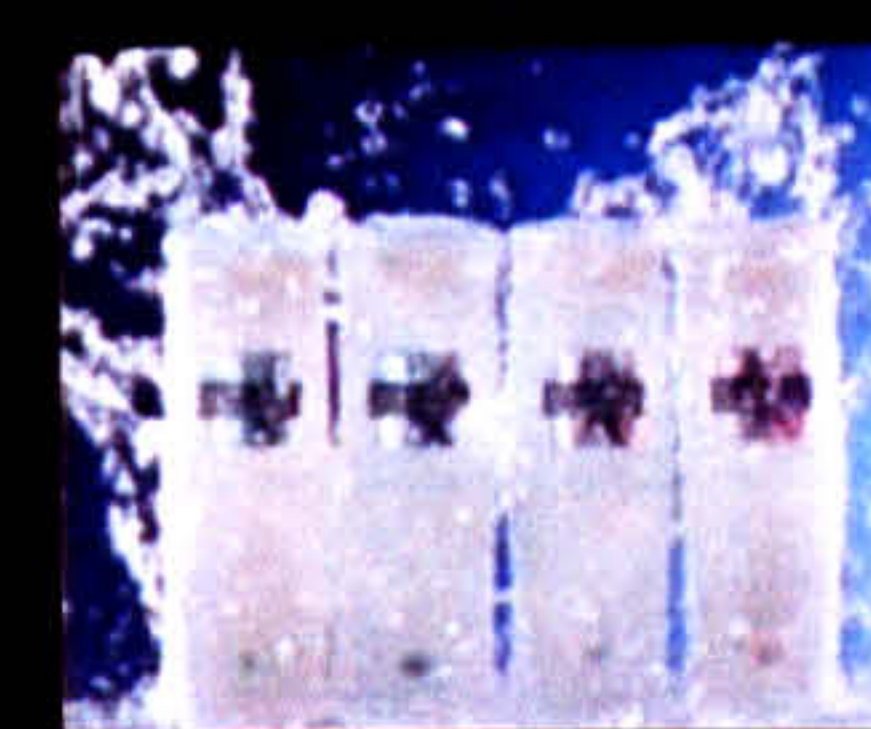
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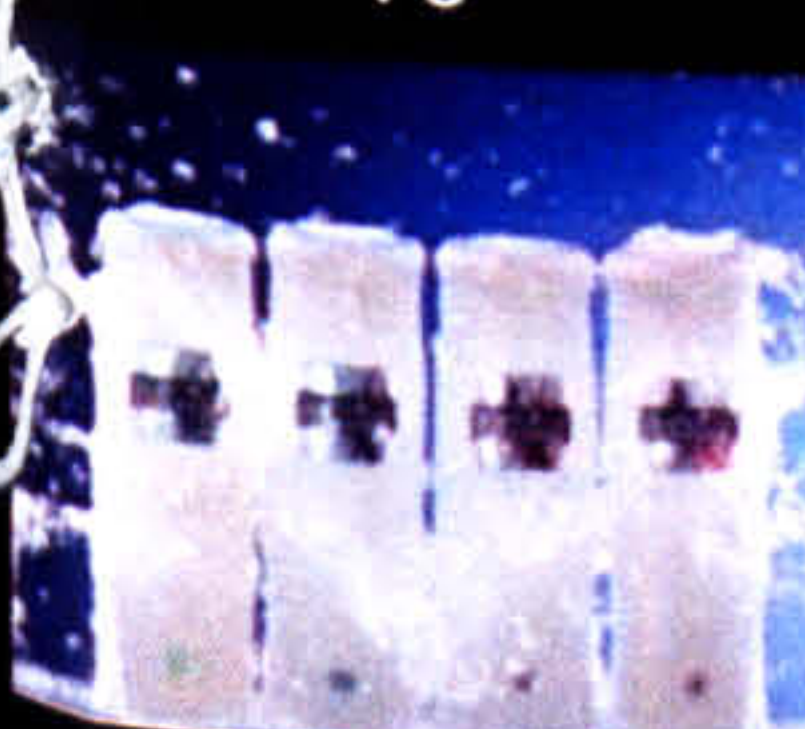
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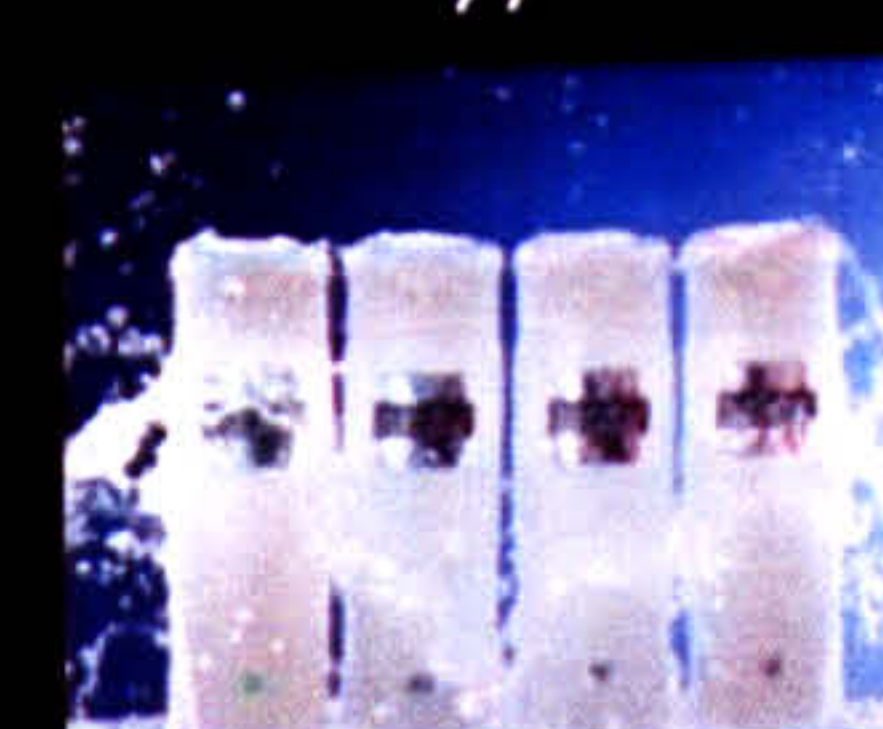
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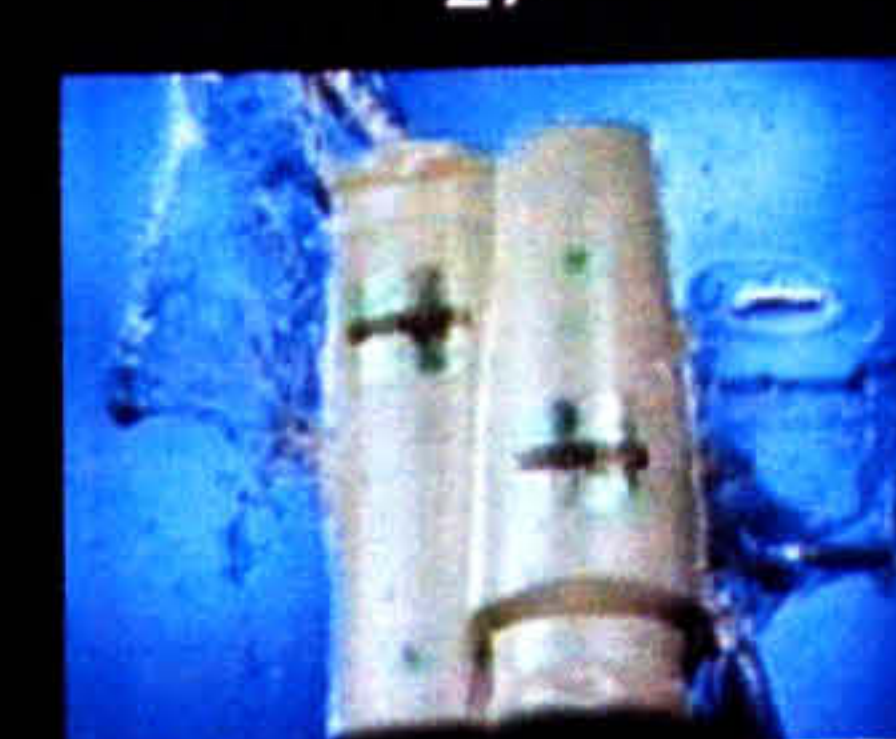
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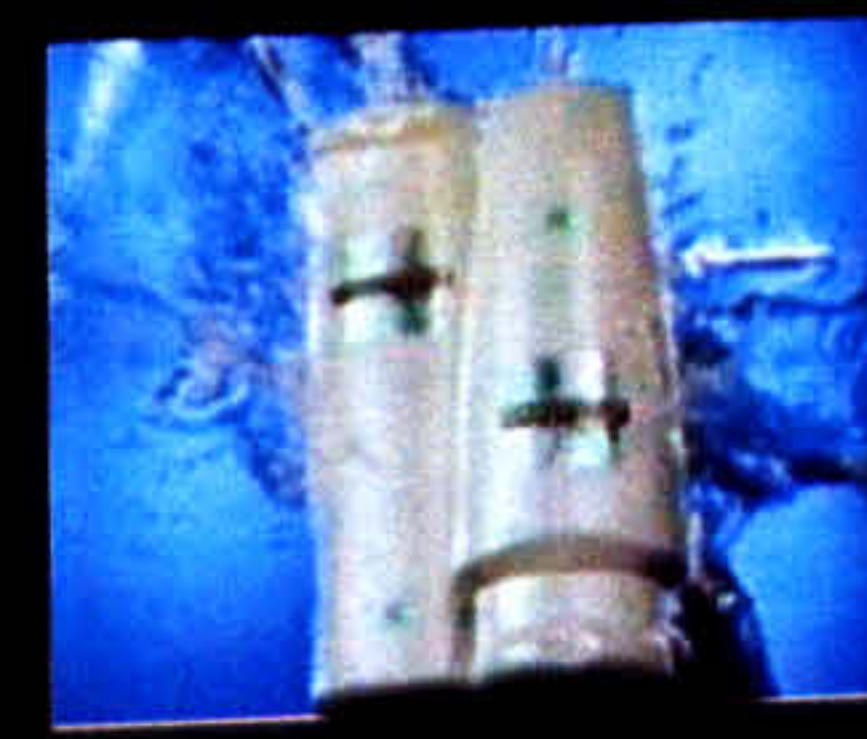
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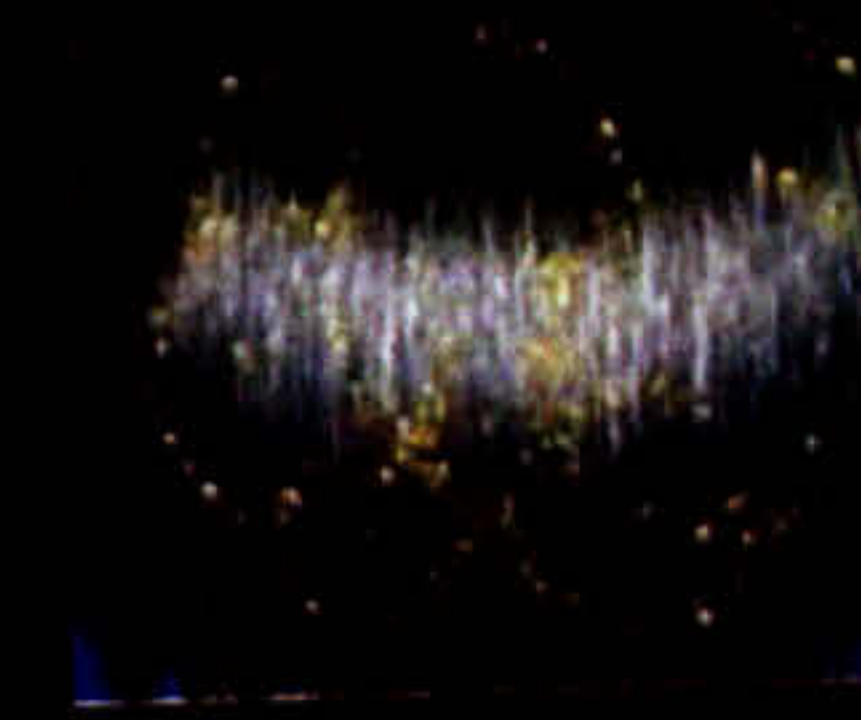
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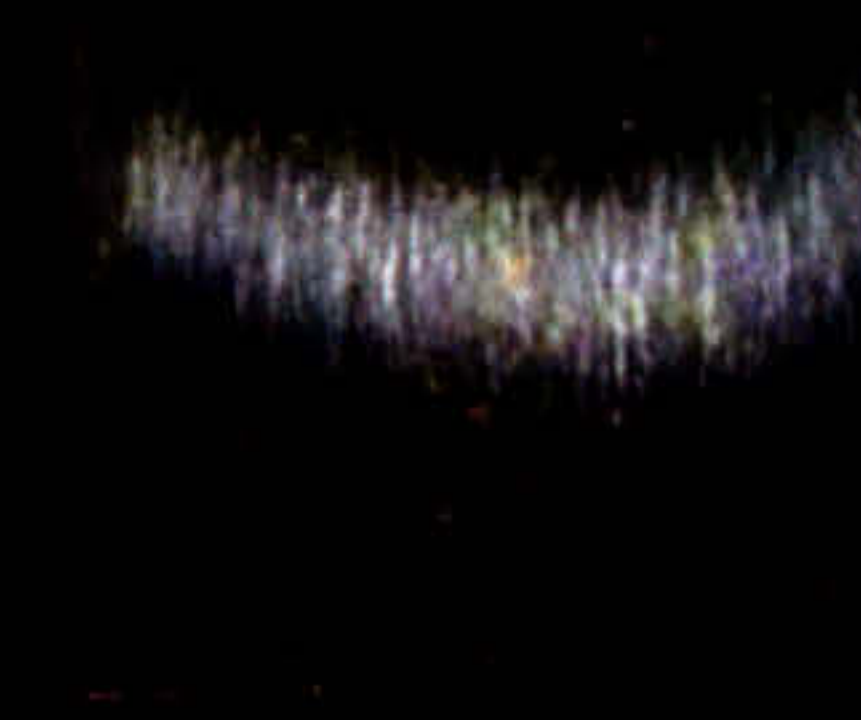
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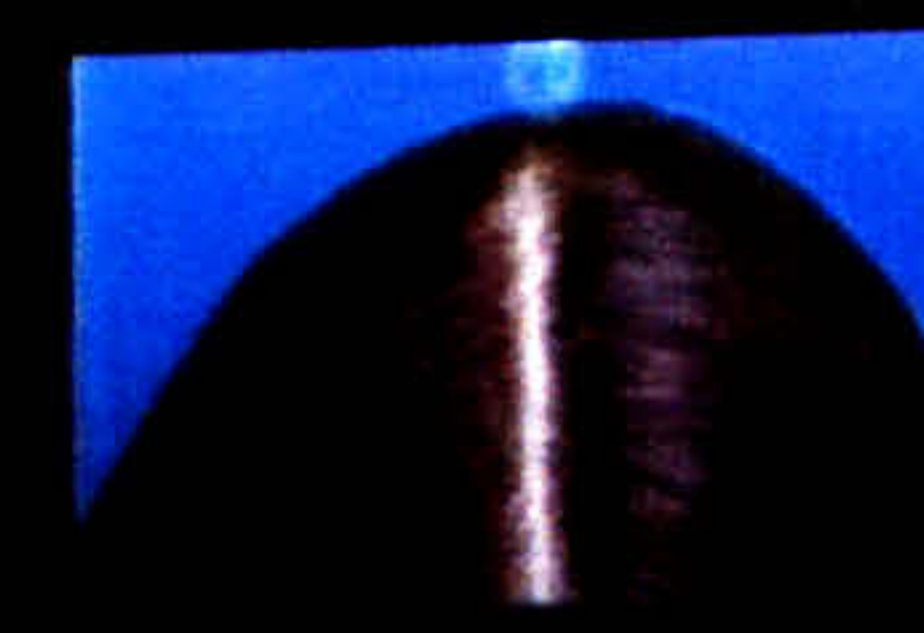
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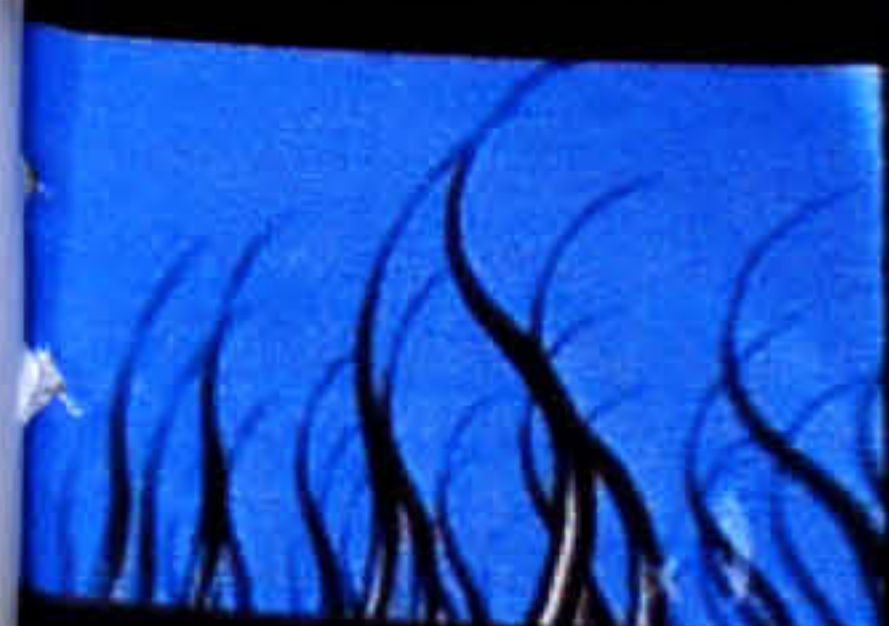


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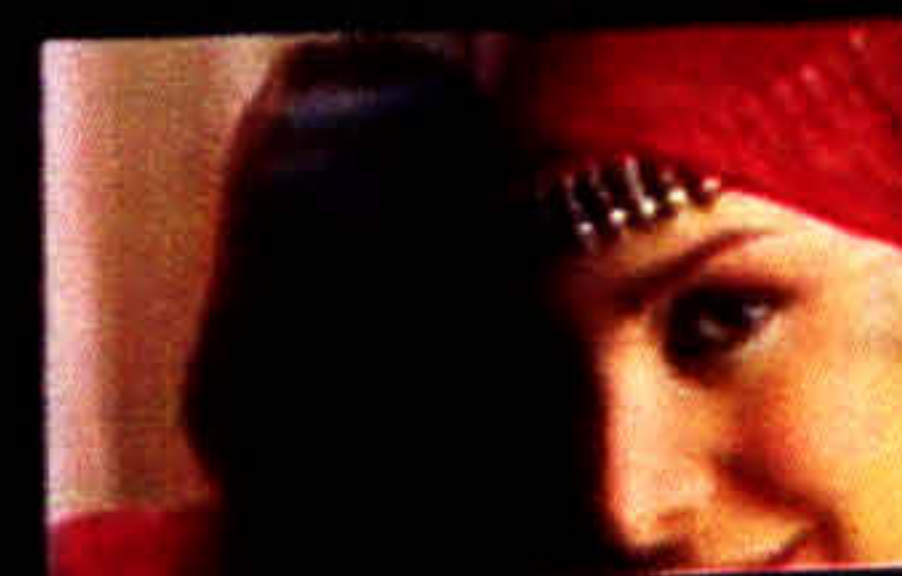
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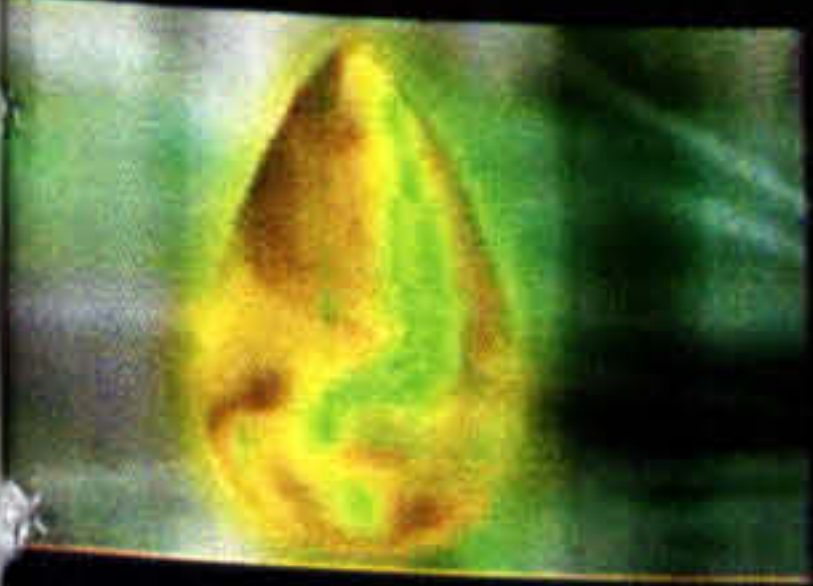
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## 4.2 The 'Abāyah-as-Fashion: Contesting Ideological Constructions of Dress

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The 'abāyah is a black, wide, loose garment with large wing-like sleeves and an opening in the front with no fastenings (Figure 5.2.1). Originating from the eastern region of Saudi Arabia, the 'abāyah is the predominant form of female dress throughout the Arab Gulf States. Donning the 'abāyah constitutes a *veiling* practice and is an institutionalised form of national dress that is socio-legally implemented by the state. One crucial difference within the Arab Gulf States is that *veiling* is only legally enforced in Saudi Arabia. This distinction engenders a significant shift between the state and social attitudes to dress (such as fashion), for both *veiling* practices (such as having to cover the face) and codes of modesty are policed by the presence of a 'moral' institution in Saudi Arabia, known as 'The Commission for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice.'

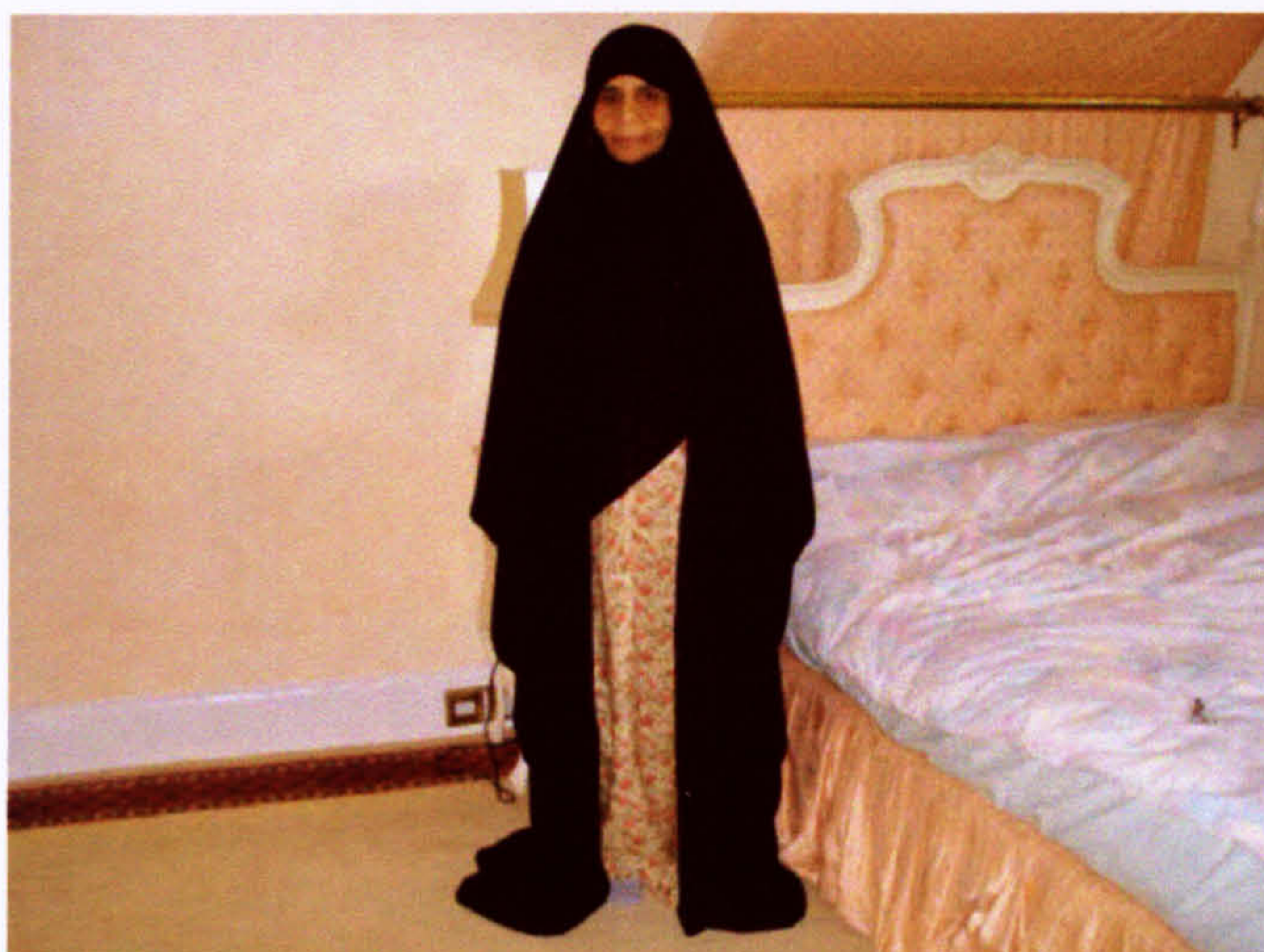


Figure 5.2.1: 'Abāyah (2007)

In neighbouring states, the 'abāyah is socially rather than legally enforced and is



thus embedded in a wider discourse concerning constructions of Islamic national identity, cultural authenticity and the preservation of tradition articulated by society and the state. It is crucial to note that within the Arab Gulf States, national dress is prescribed for the indigenous population regardless of gender and thus, although not sanctioned in law, continues to operate within a power dynamic between citizens and the state. Whilst the references here outlined situate the 'abāyah within the context of national dress, *veiling* in the Arab Gulf States nonetheless constitutes a social and cultural practice that continues to be inscribed within the complex of honour and shame. The female indigenous population, therefore, witnesses a social and cultural enforcement with reference to the 'abāyah, which simultaneously operates in relation to the production of national identity as defined by the regional hegemonic discourses of Islamic nationalism.

The articulation of gendered national identities in the name of tradition and authenticity recalls Chatterjee's contention regarding nationalism's 'answer' to the social position of women in early- and mid-nineteenth-century Bengal.<sup>1</sup> In *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Chatterjee argues that nationalism's success was founded on situating 'the woman's question' in an 'inner domain of sovereignty,' an element of national culture that was constituted in the light of the discovery of 'tradition.'<sup>2</sup> He further argues that triumph over colonial domination required that 'the superior techniques of organizing material life' be incorporated within indigenous cultures, which did not necessarily 'imply the imitation of the West, in every aspect of life' since 'the self identity of national culture itself would be threatened.'<sup>3</sup> The implementation of national dress within the



region of the Arab Gulf clearly embodies an 'inner domain' of national culture that emerges in the light of tradition. Here, the preservation of 'the self identity of national culture' is posited in relation to a threat posed by the rapid pursuit of modernization and the increasingly disproportionate ratio between the indigenous and the ex-patriot communities within the region.

In February 2007, a public pronouncement on the issue of Emirati national identity and its preservation was made by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai. This statement forms part of a wider strategy developed by the Government of Dubai under the title *Strategic Plan 2015*, which has recently been ratified by the Federal Government. In the category of social development, the policy objectives include achieving demographic balance, increasing a sense of belonging and raising awareness of local culture.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, a ninth grade textbook entitled *National Studies* recently made explicit reference to the future extinction of the Emirates' indigenous population. The year is 5,000 and a skeleton in Emirati national dress is exhibited in a museum as bemused tourists gather round taking pictures (Figure 5.2.2).<sup>5</sup> These examples briefly serve to illustrate what is demonstrably an increasing concern over the issue of Emirati national identity and furthermore contextualize the extent to which the socio-legal implementation of Islamic national dress operates to preserve cultural authenticity and tradition as articulated by the state.





Figure 5.2.2: *National Studies* (2007)

Following this, it could therefore be argued, as Chatterjee does for India, ‘that the position of [the Arab Gulf national] in “modern society” is not necessarily posited on identity but on a difference with perceived forms of cultural modernity.’<sup>6</sup> As Chatterjee explains, the ‘ideological principle of *selection*’ that underpins the ‘nationalist paradigm’ is here in operation, where as long as the state takes

care to retain the spiritual distinctiveness of its culture, it [can] make all the compromises and adjustments necessary to adapt itself to the requirements of a modern material world without losing its true identity.<sup>7</sup>

In the region of the Arab Gulf, national dress is rendered *the* visible signifier of the nation’s ‘true identity’ in the face of its relationship with ‘the modern material world.’ Moreover, whilst the implementation of the *’abāyah* is born out a discourse concerned with the articulation of authenticity and the preservation of tradition, it nonetheless contributes to a contentious form of female emancipation since it displaces the boundaries of the home by serving as a literal marker of socially approved female conduct. It thereby allows women entrance into the public realm,



herein embodying what Chatterjee describes as the signs of ‘spiritual femininity’: dress and religiosity.<sup>8</sup> Chatterjee writes that the ‘new patriarchy advocated by nationalism conferred upon women the honour of a new social responsibility.’<sup>9</sup> In a region facing rapid and continuous modernization, the ‘*abāyah*’ stands as the symbol of this responsibility, endowing a certain degree of independence hitherto denied to women, yet one which continues to operate within the parameters of a hegemonic discourse, thereby engendering ‘a new, and yet entirely legitimate subordination.’<sup>10</sup>

Research I conducted in 2004 into the institutionalization of established ‘fashion houses,’ alongside the rapid growth in the number of boutiques and fashion shows across the Arab Gulf, illustrated the increasing popularity of the ‘*abāyah*-as-fashion’ amongst upper- and middle-class women in the region.<sup>11</sup> The analysis which follows is concerned with this phenomenon, where I continue to examine the notion of an ‘immodest modesty’ within the field of fashion to explore the relationship between the manifestation of the ‘*abāyah*-as-fashion’ and its socio-legal implementation by the state. It is important to reiterate that an immodest modesty in this instance does not imply an incongruity between fashion and the *Muslim female subject*, but rather refers to the way in which new *veiling* practices that are accommodated by the state contest and resist ideological constructions of the *Muslim female subject* as defined by influential religious scholars.<sup>12</sup> I proceed to demonstrate how the concept of fashion is often privileged over the practice of *veiling* within the context of the censure of female display. I also interrogate the parameters in which the ‘*abāyah*-as-fashion’ continues to be accommodated, and consider the extent to which this manifestation of the *veil*-as-supplement constitutes a form of resistance in its



reiteration of power. I argue that the displacement of ideological constructions of dress through the promotion of female display and the articulation of gendered subjectivities provide a site in which the question agency can be located.

My reading of Yeğenoğlu's argument concerning the *veil* as *différance* is pertinent to this analysis. Whilst Chapter Three was concerned with the way in which the *veil* stands as element of embodied subjectivity and thus exemplified Yeğenoğlu's reading of the *veil* as *différance*, this analysis illustrates the way in which the *veil* can be understood as simultaneously adopting the state of dress/non-dress, such that it becomes, as Derrida writes, 'an operation that sows confusion between opposites and stands between the opposites at once.'<sup>13</sup> The corpus in this analysis includes visual material from fashion shows, *Al-Mottahajiba* and *Sweet Lady* (2003); women's magazines and source material from fieldwork conducted in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (2004–2006).

A show by the fashion label *Al-Mottahajiba* held in Doha in 2003 revealed a procession of 'abāyahs that appeared uniform in style, where the models *veiled* and *unveiled* themselves on stage to entertain the audience (Figure 5.2.3). The *unveiling* act is in this context rendered an ironic gesture with reference to the fashion brand's display of its products, for whilst *Al-Mottahajiba* translates into 'the *veiled* woman,' the models nonetheless continued to *unveil* themselves before the audience. The fashion show continued to depict the models performing this act, in which all the 'abāyahs on display were black and long with the only negligible distinction being in the variation of fabric. This repeated performance can arguably be seen as a



sartorial strategy, whereby the *'abāyah* is brought into play on stage so as to relieve the monotonous procession of clothes predominantly similar in design.



Figure 5.2.3: *Al-Mottahajiba* (2003)

In Chapter Three I referred to Ossman, who argues that ‘the power of the enlightening process’ is further revealed in the way in which ‘more “background styles” seem to be becoming light and emerging as figures of “la mode.”’<sup>14</sup> However, she later explains that ‘en-lightening might put all bodies on a single plane and, in making them subject to the same standards of judgment, give them similar goals, bringing about new kinds of competition.’<sup>15</sup> She draws on Gustave Gebauer’s and Christoph Wulf’s notion of ‘Social Mimesis,’ which, ‘designates the process in which rivalries arise between individuals and groups sharing the same goal of action.’<sup>16</sup> Ossman explains how this notion ‘brings to mind the strategies of some *muhajibat* [sic] who claim that their dress, like school uniforms, eliminates competition among women.’<sup>17</sup> In the case of the *'abāyah*-as-fashion, however, the notion of ‘social mimesis’ is further honed, since the ‘approximation of individuals



to each other, their becoming similar' operates within a specific ideological framework: the notion of 'equivalence' relates not only to wearing the '*abāyah*' but furthermore to the colour black. Thus, in this instance, competition is founded not only on a complicity within *veiling* practices, but also in the way the *Muslim female subject* distinguishes herself in relation to others 'on a single plane,' namely those wear the same colour.<sup>18</sup>

A fashion show for *Sweet Lady* held in Dubai in 2003 presents an interesting case in light of this latter contention, and varies significantly from the '*abāyahs*' exhibited at the *Al-Mottahajiba* fashion show (Figure 5.2.4). The first model appears wearing a *shailah/tarhah* (head veil) and an '*abāyah*', with the front of which is dominated by an elaborate silver and bronze sequined design, whilst the rest remains black. Further, the '*abāyah*' is streamlined and slightly tailored around the waist (SL.1). Another design reveals a varying cut that is gathered at the waist and then flares into a full hem. Here, a *shailah/tarhah* is not present, but rather the model carries a fan, which like the design around the hem and lower-centre of the '*abāyah*' is made up of peacock feathers. Moreover, the sleeves are puffed and full-bodied, unlike the streamlined sleeves in the first design (SL.2). Whilst these '*abāyahs*' are considerably extravagant, the colours nonetheless remain subdued in relation to the black fabric.





Figure 5.2.4: *Sweet Lady* (2003)

In contrast, another design presents an incorporation of vibrant colours, with thick bright fuchsia stripes across the 'abāyah and the edge of the *shailah/tarhah* and a large pink flower attached to the model's chest (SL.3). Similarly, in SL.4, bright pink flowers in sequence also present a contrast against the black, whilst the *shailah/tarhah* displays a design across the whole fabric as opposed to only on its borders. Other incorporations include the use of mohair, as shown in SL.5. Whilst the 'abāyahs discussed so far differ in the way in which colours and designs are incorporated within the black fabric, instances of patterned fabric or images imposed



on the black fabric itself are also manifest, as is the case with the pattern of pink roses in SL.6 and the image of a shark in SL.7.1-2

These innovations primarily refer to the way each design is distinguished from the others, thereby suggesting endless possible variations to the black '*abāyah*'. However, they simultaneously present the limitations inherent in renewing the '*abāyah*', which is arguably a reason for the level of extravagance manifest in these designs. For example, the '*abāyahs*' in SL.1 and SL.2 refer to a formal style of dressing, where the '*abāyah*' is constructed through large hems and puffed sleeves. Here, designers exploit their limitations with reference to the length of the '*abāyah*' and the colour black, rendering various designs in the style of formal dresses. Deviation from the '*abāyah*' is minimal since designers exploit its essential qualities (long, black); simultaneously, however, deviation is heightened for the '*abāyah*' is transformed aesthetically into a (black) dress.

The designs in SL.5 and SL.6 present the contrary, since they reveal how images on clothing are obscured by the necessity to wear an '*abāyah*' on top. The shark in SL.6, for example, transports a bold and centralized design reminiscent of those more familiarly found on a T-shirt onto the '*abāyah*' itself. Whilst such patterns and images are visually prominent, they are nonetheless manifested within certain boundaries, such that their contribution to the fabric does not constitute a complete deviation from the colour black. Thus, whilst these examples of the '*abāyah*-as-fashion' are produced within certain parameters, they also reveal how 'stylistic



deviance' is engendered as a result of having continuously to renew the '*abāyah* in light of its restrictions.<sup>19</sup>

In essence, the '*abāyah*, like the *chador*, can be deemed what Ossman refers to as a 'background' style, on account of its uniformity of its style and colour, as revealed in the *Al-Mottahajiba* fashion show. However, whilst Ossman argues that the power of the en-lightening process is manifested in the way that 'background styles' themselves transform into figures of fashion, her argument is concerned above all with the practice of *veiling* itself, and not with institutionalized forms of dress. Thus, downveiling and the en-lightening process render the *Muslim female subject* reliant on 'the heavy indistinct contours of background bodies to validate her own demonstration of making choices about what to wear.'<sup>20</sup> The *chador* and the *maḡnaṭ* – institutionalized forms of dress – do not transform dramatically; rather, they remain constant against the evolution of new *veiling* practices. In contrast, the phenomenon of the '*abāyah*-as-fashion, as is particularly demonstrated in the *Sweet Lady* fashion show, not only presents a case of new *veiling* practices in a varying situated context, but furthermore reveals how the en-lightening process can operate with reference to institutionalized forms of national dress.

In her argument concerning the 1970s revival of the *hijāb* 'throughout the Islamic East ... in the context of an emergent Islamic consciousness,' El Guindi defines *tabarruj* as 'the notion of immoderate excess.'<sup>21</sup> She explains how this term, alongside the 'contrasting opposition *tahajjub/sufur* [*sic*]' (*veiling/de-veiling*), were part of 'a revived contemporary vocabulary' that 'framed the debate about Muslim



women's dress and men's dress, conduct, morality and Islamic identity.'<sup>22</sup>

According to the *Al-Mawrid Dictionary*, the notion of immoderate excess in relation to woman (*tabarruj al-mar'ah*) is defined as:

to adorn herself, groom herself, bedeck herself, preen herself, primp, toilet, dress up, smarten up, spruce up, doll up, to make up, paint and powder, use or apply cosmetics, put on make-up, to display her charms.<sup>23</sup>

In a lecture concerning 'The Legality of The *Hijāb*' (*Mashrū'iyat Al-Hijāb*), the Saudi religious cleric Abd-al-Aziz ibn Abd-Allah ibn Baaz, also known as Bin Baz, contends that *zīnah* (adornment), which he labels 'prohibited,' 'is defined as everything which is loved by a man or a woman and which draws attention whether it is natural or acquired.'<sup>24</sup> He adds:

In the case of the natural, it is the face and hair as well as the hands, feet and so on. If the face is the origin of *zīnah* and it is unequivocally the basic source of temptation in a woman and the source of desire in men then prohibiting its *de-veiling* takes precedence over covering any other adornment of the body.<sup>25</sup>

Following this, he advocates that women should *veil* their heads, bodies and faces, 'except that which is apparent,' as expressed in the *Al-Nūr* verse, which he interprets as referring to 'outer clothing,' whilst other scholars, he explains, interpret it as referring to the face and hands.<sup>26</sup> In *The Status of Woman in Islam*, the religious cleric Dr Yusuf Al-Qaradawy offers a different argument, contending that 'Islam has set its codes for the woman ... to guard her femininity and acknowledge its needs so as not to repress it.'<sup>27</sup> He provides 'a rough summation of Islam's attitude to femininity,' which states:



Islam protects femininity to keep the stream of tenderness and beauty running. For this reason some of the things that men are forbidden to do are permissible for women. So the woman can wear gold and pure silk; hence the *Hadīth*, 'These two (substances) are prohibited for the men of my nation and allowed for its women' ... The permission to use things that suit women is supported by forbidding them from handling things that go against their femininity, such as men's wear [*sic*], movement and behaviour in general. A woman is not to wear a man's garment; a man is not to wear a woman's garment. The Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) says: 'Allāh condemns the man who dresses like a woman and the woman who dresses like a man.'<sup>28</sup>

Al-Qaradawy further argues that 'Allāh's Religion protects [woman's] morals and decency, guards her reputation and dignity, and defends her chastity against evil thoughts.'<sup>29</sup> He adds that, 'in order to achieve these noble objectives, Islam makes it incumbent on the woman to lower the eyes and preserve chastity and purity.'<sup>30</sup> In this context, he asserts that a woman needs to 'preserve a decent, unrevealing manner of dress and ornamentation, all without being oppressive towards her,' and refers to the *Al-Nūr* verse, which requires women 'not to show off their adornment except that which is apparent.' He continues,

The visible or apparent ornament that the verse refers to has been interpreted to be inclusive of *kohl*, the finger ring, the face, the two hands and, some exegetes and jurists establish, the two feet.<sup>31</sup>

The reference 'except that which is apparent' and the concept that adornment (*zīnah*) is forbidden are continuing sites for disputation and interpretation, as evinced by the clerical arguments above, where definitions of 'the apparent' range extensively from *kohl* to outer-clothing. The clerical arguments, however, reveal that the phenomenon



of the '*abāyah*-as-fashion stands in uneasy relation to the ideological construction of femininity as defined by the Islamic patriarchal hegemonic order, most significantly in relation to the censure of female display.

In light of new *veiling* practices within the region of the Arab Gulf, a hegemonic status of dress, namely *al-'abāyah al-shar'iyah* (the legal '*abāyah*'), hereafter referred to as 'the hegemonic construct,' has been (re)defined as a result of the popular emergence of the '*abāyah*-as-fashion. The Saudi Arabian women's magazine *Laha* (For Her) cites *Fatwa 21352*, issued by 'The Committee for Scientific Studies and *Ifta'* (deliverance of a formal legal opinion),' to provide the following specifications for the '*abāyah*:

- 1) It should be thick and non-clinging.
- 2) It should be 'all-covering,' that is of the entire body and loose such that it does not describe the contours of the body.
- 3) It should be open only in front, while the sleeve opening should be small.
- 4) It should not contain adornment (*zīnah*), which may attract the eyes and therefore should be free from drawings, decorations, writings and symbols.
- 5) It should not be similar to the clothing of infidel women (*kāfirāt*) or men.
- 6) It should be placed on the top of the head (*hāmat al-ra'ss*).<sup>32</sup>

These specifications render *al-'abāyah al-shar'iyah* in opposition to the concept of fashion itself, especially within the context of *tabarruj*, referred to as 'may attract the eyes.' Moreover, the insistence that it should not illustrate the contours of the (female) body creates further tension between 'the hegemonic construct' and the phenomenon of the '*abāyah*-as-fashion.<sup>33</sup>



A ‘waisted’ *’abāyah* known as *al-’abāyah al-mukhassarah* (Figure 5.2.5) exploded on to the fashion scene about three years ago and presents a paradigmatic case of the inherent contradiction in the *’abāyah*-as-fashion, by which it seems to exist to some extent at odds with itself. In this case, a direct opposition to ‘the hegemonic construct’ is manifest in the first two specifications delivered by ‘The Legality of The *Hijāb*,’ namely, that it is ‘clinging’ and ‘describes the contours of the body.’ Furthermore, as is the case with the examples discussed from *Sweet Lady*, the essential qualities of the *’abāyah* (long, black) are in this instance preserved, thus illustrating both a resistance to and deviation from the *’abāyah*, whilst simultaneously exercising deviation in the way that the *’abāyah*-as-fashion comes to acquire the status of a black dress. In this construction, the *’abāyah*-as-fashion notably disrupts its ‘primary’ signification without ever displacing it.<sup>34</sup>



Figure 5.2.5: *Al-’abāyah al-mukhassarah* (2006)

In *The Fashion System*, Barthes writes,

Fashion understands the opposition between the feminine and the masculine quite well; reality itself requires that it do so (i.e., on the denotative level), since reality often puts features derived from men’s clothing (pants, tie,



jacket) in women's wardrobes; in fact, between the two kinds of clothing, differential signs are extremely rare and are always situated at the level of the detail (e.g., the way in which women's clothes are fastened): feminine clothing can absorb nearly all masculine clothing ... Fashion notably acknowledges the *boyish look*.<sup>35</sup>

Recent trends in the '*abāyah*-as-fashion reveal how references to male clothing have been produced. Barthes' contention that 'differential signs are always ... situated at the level of detail' is clearly illustrated in Figure 5.2.6, for here a reference to men's clothing is evident in the sleeves that denotatively refer to the *shmāgh* (men's chequered head dress) in the chequered pattern, which, like the colour black on the '*abāyah*, refers on a connotative level to gender. Another prevalent trend known as *al-bisht* manifests Barthes' contention regarding 'features derived from men's clothing,' since a *bisht* is a cloak, which though previously reserved exclusively for men has come to be worn by women as an '*abāyah* (Figure 5.2.6).<sup>36</sup>



Figure 5.2.6: '*Abāyah-shmāgh* (2006); *Al-bisht* (2006)

Whilst these examples foreground the concept of the '*abāyah*-as-fashion, they simultaneously oppose the 'ideological construct' of dress in as far as the fifth specification is concerned, which states that the '*abāyah* should not be similar to the



clothing of men. Furthermore, the cleric Al-Qaradawy warns that ‘Allāh condemns ... the woman who dresses like a man,’ for ‘three (kinds of people) do not enter Paradise ... a son who is disobedient to his parents, a mannish woman and an adulterer.’<sup>37</sup>

In an interview I conducted with Halima Al-Shamry, a designer for the ‘*abāyah*’ label *Fashion Top*, she described a more recent and radically popular trend to have emerged from within the fashion scene:

The fashion these days is *al-farāshah* [the butterfly (Figure 5.2.7)] a loose ‘*abāyah*’, which is closer to *al-‘abāyah al-shar’iyah*, where its length and width are the same, and it is non transparent ... while being *shar’iyah* at the same time, since it is wide and not tight. It can also double as a gown where a woman prefers to keep it on, instead of removing it when indoors.<sup>38</sup>

The distinct style of *al-farāshah* is undoubtedly a response to the ‘waisted’ ‘*abāyah*’ and similar designs which accentuate the contours of the female body, the current mode dictating that the ‘*abāyah*’ be worn ‘over-sized’ and thus recalling specifications forbidding the outlines of the female form as defined by ‘the hegemonic construct.’ However, whilst the designer explains that it is considered *shar’iyah* in its loose-fitting cut, the incorporation of embroidery and design on *al-farāshah* have been extensively produced, and therein oppose the fourth specification detailed by ‘The Legality of The *Hijāb*’ that the ‘*abāyah*’ should be free from ‘drawings and decorations’ and not ‘attract the eyes.’ In this light, although the designer reads this particular innovation as referring to ‘the hegemonic construct,’ within the context of fashion, from which *al-farāshah* was primarily conceived and



produced, it could be argued that it in fact embodies the concept of retro, namely in the way that it alludes to the 'abāyah in its 'original' form (Figure 5.2.1).



Figure 5.2.7: *Al-farāshah* (2006)

In 'Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse,' Kaja Silverman argues that in *The Fashion System*, Barthes describes 'fashion as a discourse which vehemently denies the possibility of any relation with its own recent past – as a discourse predicated upon the disavowal of its own historical construction.'<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Barthes writes, 'every new Fashion is a refusal to inherit, a subversion against the oppression of the preceding Fashion.'<sup>40</sup> Silverman, in contrast, asserts that,

Retro refuses this antithesis. Because its elements connote not only a generalized 'oldness', but a specific moment both in the (social) history of clothing, and in that of a cluster of closely allied discourses ... it inserts its wearer into a complex network of cultural and historical references. At the same time, it avoids the pitfalls of a naïve referentiality; by putting in quotation marks around the garments it revitalizes, it makes clear that the past is available to us only in a textual form, and through mediation of the present.<sup>41</sup>



It could be argued that *al-farāshah* illustrates Silverman's contention regarding retro, since its cut does connote a 'specific moment ... in the (social) history' of the 'abāyah. However, it simultaneously avoids 'a naïve referentiality,' for a recontextualization is here manifest principally in the way that the sleeves are fitted and gathered around the forearm, which is not the case with the 'abāyah in its original form (Figure 5.2.1). Moreover, deviations such as detailed embroidery and the use of contemporary fabrics such as chiffon (Figure 5.2.8) reinforce the manner in which, as Silverman writes, 'the past is available ... only in a textual form, and through mediation of the present,' which further informs the way in which *al-farāshah* can be regarded as retro within the ideological system of the 'abāyah-as-fashion.



Figure 5.2.8: *Al-farāshah-chiffon* (2006); *Al-farāshah-talli* (2006); *Talli* (2007)

The detail illustrated in *al-farāshah-talli* (Figure 5.2.8) reveals the inscription of elements which 'connote a general oldness.' In this instance, the cuff incorporates *talli*, a traditional form of metalwork embroidery, which is used on dresses and the bottom of pantaloons worn underneath dresses (Figure 5.2.8). In as far as the



'*abāyah*-as-fashion is concerned, *talli* connotes a particular time – 'a general oldness' – for it is predominantly worn by a certain generation of women and is furthermore a central feature in the costume of the Arab Gulf. In image A.F.T., the detailing of the cuff notably evokes the way *talli* is used on pantaloons, for as demonstrated in its incorporation in the sleeves of *al-farāshah*, *talli* detailing is isolated and rendered the only design feature around the hem of the sleeve, thereby recalling the way it is used on the hem of the pantaloon.

A fashion spread for the women's magazine *Al-Usra Al-A'ssriyah* (2003) presents images 'from the designs of Judith ... the Gulf '*abāyah* with a touch of the French' (Figure 5.2.9). Here, both the black '*abāyah* and *shailah/tarhah* (head *veil*) are presented as a set sharing the same trimming around the borders of the fabric. The woman is *downveiled* whilst her neck and body are covered. Through the model's pose, the '*abāyah* is gathered and held against her waist. Her pose and gaze suggest a heightened sexualization of dress, which, alongside references to France, render the '*abāyah* as primarily constituting a fashion entity. In this illustration, the codes of modesty are clearly disrupted through the overt sexualization of dress, where the contours of the female body are made apparent. This example of the '*abāyah*-as-fashion clearly stands in direct opposition to 'the ideological construct' and further recalls the 'waisted' '*abāyah* described earlier in this analysis.





Figure 5.2.9: *Al-Usra Al-A'ssriyah* (2003)

The recent trends discussed reveal how the 'abāyah-as fashion privileges the concept of fashion over the practice of *veiling* itself. This is primarily manifested in the way that examples of the 'abāyah-as-fashion stand in opposition to 'the hegemonic construct.' References to male clothing further enforce this inclination since, though 'the woman who dresses like a man' is condemned in the text provided by Al-Qaradawy, Barthes observes that, 'Fashion notably acknowledges the *boyish look*.'<sup>42</sup> The privileging of fashion over *veiling* is similarly enforced by the way that retro is inscribed within the ideological system of the 'abāyah-as-fashion.<sup>43</sup> Fundamentally, the 'abāyah-as-fashion disrupts the function of the *veil*, since these examples suggest that it is not necessarily worn to 'veil' but rather to display.

In 'The Market for Identities: Secularism, Islamism, Commodities,' Yael Navaro-Yashin explores the symbol of the *veil* 'in the real and imagined terms of everyday life' in Turkey.<sup>44</sup> She explains that 'Commodification had much to do with the reification of certain symbols ... as emblems of "identity."'<sup>45</sup> Referring to a fashion show by *Tekbir*, 'Turkey's biggest Muslim apparel company,' she argues that the



*veil* 'assumed such significance and power that it no longer mattered too much for consumers of Tekbir products whether the representation, as such, was a construction.'<sup>46</sup> She further contends that 'women consumed "veils" in and of themselves, rather than for what they stood for ... Veils were only signifiers now, not requiring the other half of the orderly binary pair (a signified),' such that 'The politics of identity was transformed into a politics over symbols in the context of consumerism.'<sup>47</sup> She argues,

The veil has a social life, a different one now, as signifier. It does not simply refer to female religiosity or belief. It has gained meaning in and of itself, and almost independently of belief. It symbolises itself, and in itself refers to the politics of identity ... It takes on added significance in itself ('it,' rather than 'belief,' becomes the fetish; or, rather than remaining a symbol of belief, 'it,' the symbol itself, becomes significant (the signifier in and of itself) where politics is waged over the symbol more than over its content.<sup>48</sup>

The *Al-Mottahajiba* fashion show described earlier epitomizes Navaro-Yashin's contention that the *veil* within the context of consumerism has come to symbolize itself. The '*abāyahs* in this instance are not exaggerated manifestations of fashion but rather are black, long and simple in design. In other words, the '*abāyah* does not allude or refer to anything other than itself, where "'it," rather than 'belief,' becomes the fetish.' The *veiling* and *unveiling* acts performed by the models to relieve the monotonous procession of '*abāyahs* further demonstrates the extent to which the '*abāyah* stands 'independently of belief.' Other examples extend this observation and illustrate Navaro-Yashin's contention concerning the relationship between the politics of symbols and the politics of identity. For example, an '*abāyah* from *Fashion Top* prominently displays the image of King Abdullah Al-Su'ud on the



front and the royal crest of the House of Al-Su'ud on the reverse (Figure 5.2.10). In a similar vein, at the end of the *Sweet Lady* fashion show, a model emerged wearing an 'abāyah adorned with the portraits of Sheikh Maktoum Al-Maktoum and Sheikh Mohammed Al-Maktoum, the former and current rulers of Dubai, along with a map of the United Arab Emirates and the colours of its flag (Figure 5.2.10) Crucially, unlike Turkey, the politics of identity is here posited within the context of nationalism and implies the implementation of the 'abāyah as national dress. The preservation of its essential qualities (long, black) juxtaposed against the images of rulers in the bold design presents a reification of national symbols in the context of consumerism. This manifestation therefore similarly stands independently of belief, for the design notably opposes the 'hegemonic construct' within the context of *tabarruj*. The 'abāyah is not displaced, however, since its symbolism continues to be restored.



Figure 5.2.10: 'Abāyah-House of Su'ud (2006); 'Abāyah-United Arab Emirates (2004)



It could thus be argued that, whilst the '*abāyah*-as-fashion opposes 'the hegemonic construct,' consent by the hegemonic order is situated in relation to the politics of symbols, namely in the manner in which its essential qualities (long, black) continue to be upheld in its various manifestations. It is in this context, therefore, that the politics of identity is transformed into a politics over symbols. Rather than solely embodying 'the signifier in and of itself,' the socio-legal implementation of the '*abāyah* in the Arab Gulf States stands in essence as a *signifier* of belief. This, alongside the fact that the '*abāyah*-as-fashion opposes the 'hegemonic construct,' where its essential qualities are almost always deemed unalterable, and by extension cannot be displaced, implies that the production(s) of Islamic national discourse is fundamentally a 'politics waged over the symbol more than over its content.'

Earlier, I appropriated Winship's argument with reference to *Head and Shoulders* advertisements to suggest that 'we participate in a "joke,"' where the fragmentation of face and hair does not directly signify modesty when decontextualized, but rather that, through the alignment of the elements face and hair, *Head and Shoulders* 'dares the *impossible* and declares that it is' modest. In as far as the '*abāyah*-as-fashion is concerned, it could be said that fashion displaces the codes of modesty, most significantly within the context of *tabarruj*, yet through the inevitable preservation of the '*abāyah*'s symbolism as the visual signifier of modesty, the '*abāyah*-as-fashion similarly 'dares the *impossible* and declares' that it is modest, engendering a state we can term immodest modesty.



In Chapter Three, the transference of the *veil* through costume substitution and the use of the shaved head demonstrated that the codes of modesty can be maintained whilst the material *veil* is evaded on screen. Interestingly, the '*abāyah*-as-fashion presents the reverse effect: modesty is here displaced, yet the symbolism – the visual signifier of modesty – continues to be upheld. This relationship is particularly pertinent in the juxtaposition of overtly sexualized manifestations of the '*abāyah* and the preservation of its essential qualities, as exemplified by the illustration from *Al-Usra Al-A'ssriyah*. The relationship between the symbolism and the function of the *veil* recalls the image of Afagh in *Nargess*, discussed in Chapter Three, where modesty codes were displaced, yet the symbolism of the *veil* continued to be referenced within the frame, albeit to fulfil a censorship regulation. In the case of the '*abāyah*-as-fashion, however, deviation from the '*abāyah* is simultaneously engendered, where examples from *Sweet Lady* revealed the '*abāyah*'s potential to be transformed aesthetically into a dress. Thus, a case for the transference of the *veil* in the '*abāyah*-as-fashion can here be located, where the *veil*'s mobility is executed within the parameters of the perpetual restoration of the *veil*'s symbolism and the displacement of its function and form.

Following the argument established in this chapter, the '*abāyah*-as-fashion can similarly be situated within the context of the *veil*-as-supplement, established in Chapter Three. A direct substitution (something complete in itself) lies in the '*abāyah*'s essential qualities (long, black) and its perpetual restoration against its innovation through fashion. In as far as the supplement implies a deficiency or lack, this can be situated in the relationship between what Ossman refers to as



‘background styles.’ The ‘*abāyah*-as-fashion compensates for the uniformity engendered by the implementation of national dress, which would herein prevent the *Muslim female subject* from distinguishing herself ‘on a single plane.’ Furthermore, as discussed with reference to *Sweet Lady*, the way in which clothes themselves are obscured by the necessity to wear the ‘*abāyah*’ means the ‘*abāyah*-as-fashion compensates ‘for a lack in what was supposed to be complete in itself’ by embodying the status of clothes, be it T-shirts or dresses. As established, Culler explains that the supplement is presented in both meanings as ‘exterior, foreign to the “essential” nature of that to which it is added or substituted.’<sup>49</sup> In Chapter Three, exteriority in the supplement is located in relation to the *symbolism* of the *veil*, such that its evasion rendered the shaved head and costume substitution ‘foreign’ to the ‘essential’ nature of the material *veil*. In this case, it could be suggested that exteriority is situated within the context of modesty and ‘the hegemonic construct,’ which herein posits the ‘*abāyah*-as-fashion ‘foreign to the “essential nature”’ of the *function* of the *veil*.

In *The Fashion System*, Barthes further elucidates how the process of fashioning the ‘*abāyah*’ operates to a large extent at odds with itself when he writes,

Fashion dogmatically rejects the Fashion which preceded it, its own past; every new fashion is a refusal to inherit, a subversion against the oppression of the preceding Fashion; Fashion experiences itself as a Right, the natural right of the present over the past.<sup>50</sup>

Ironically, whilst the social practice of fashion is permissible within the parameters of the hegemonic order through the preservation of the ‘*abāyah*’ within the system of



the '*abāyah*-as-fashion, the dialectic 'preservation/innovation' generates an incongruity in terms of Barthes' claim that fashion rejects its own past and constitutes 'a refusal to inherit.' A reinterpretation of his argument within the context of the implementation of the '*abāyah* within social discourse, and the necessity for its preservation within the ideological system of fashion, interestingly renders the '*abāyah*-as-fashion as operating against the grain of the hegemonic order. Here, the phenomenon of 'fashioning' the '*abāyah* attempts to reject that which 'preceded it, its own past' and is therein rendered a 'subversion' against 'oppression.' To this effect, in the productions of Islamic national discourse, it could be argued that the '*abāyah*-as-fashion 'experiences itself as a Right, the natural right of the present over the past.'

In 'Bargaining with Patriarchy,' Deniz Kandiyoti argues that the way 'women strategize within a set of concrete constraints' reveals what she terms 'the patriarchal bargain of any given society, which may exhibit variations according to class, caste, and ethnicity.'<sup>51</sup> She asserts that 'systematic comparative analyses of women's strategies and coping mechanisms lead to a more culturally and temporally grounded understanding of patriarchal systems,' where 'different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct "rules of the game."'<sup>52</sup> She continues,

These patriarchal bargains exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts. They also influence both the potential for and specific forms of women's active or passive resistance in the face of their oppression.<sup>53</sup>



The re-fashioning of national dress exemplifies one such case of 'passive resistance,' for negotiations over power here operate within the parameters set by the hegemonic order and are subject to 'the internal logic of a given system.'<sup>54</sup> Whilst women may embrace the manifold innovations of the 'abāyah-as-fashion, such manifestations invariably preserve the essential qualities of the 'abāyah – the patriarchal bargain in this context insists that deviation from the 'abāyah is not possible within this system. Thus, the attempt to articulate subjectivity through the 'abāyah-as-fashion is inherently subsumed by the symbolism of Islamic national discourses, for dissent is accommodated at the price that the *signifier* of the 'abāyah is perpetually restored.

In *Accommodating Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling, and Change in Cairo*, Arlene Elowe Macleod examines 'the new veiling' with reference to lower-middle-class working women in Cairo, arguing that it 'offers a compelling and powerful form of symbolic action.'<sup>55</sup> In light of her research, Macleod asserts that in fact 'only a very small percentage of these veiling women seem to be actually turning to religion in a genuine way,' observing that, although 'the new veils are often taken as a sign of support for the Islamic resurgence, it would seem that for this subgroup of women in Cairo this interpretation is misguided.'<sup>56</sup> She writes,

Rather than participating in an overtly religious revivalism, these women express a general sense that people in their culture are turning back to a more authentic and culturally true way of life, and they perceive the veil as part of this cultural reformation.<sup>57</sup>

Macleod further asserts that, 'women who work in Cairo's lower-middle-class face the dilemma of opposing forces pushing them into two quite different roles,' with



the resultant effect that 'their traditional identity is being eroded in the process, and they must struggle to define a new identity in the political space which has arisen.'<sup>58</sup> *Veiling* 'as a public symbol,' she argues, 'expresses the tension women feel and further, serves as a method for resolving their problem by creating a new identity.'<sup>59</sup> Drawing on Foucault, Macleod argues that the new *veiling* in Cairo society 'is a key to the reality of relations of power in the process of renegotiation' since 'personal struggles over the individual body can be read as political struggles over self-determination, distribution, or opportunities – in short, over power.'<sup>60</sup>

Though executed in a different situated context, Macleod's argument can nonetheless inform my analysis of the '*abāyah*-as-fashion. A distinction needs to be made though in light of a correlation between the '*abāyah*-as-fashion and Macleod's understanding of 'the new veiling' in Cairo, where the '*abāyah* does not necessarily come to signify the observance of *sharī'a* but rather, in its implementation, refers to an authentic construction of national identity as articulated and defined by the state. Thus, whilst the element of choice is a crucial difference in the two varying contexts here discussed, the way in which 'the new veil' in Cairo does not necessarily indicate a 'support for the Islamic resurgence' is akin to the '*abāyah* and its socio-legal implementation by the state, namely in its reification as a 'a public symbol.' Macleod asserts that the 'new veiling' in Cairo arises from the popular embrace of cultural authenticity, with the *veil* rendered an element of this 'cultural reformation.' In the Arab Gulf States, however, cultural authenticity and cultural reformation are produced by the hegemonic order and are thus not initiated by popular discourses.



In my interview with Halima Al-Shamry, the designer stressed that the *'abāyah*-as-fashion has become an element integral to contemporary social practices within the region:

With reference to Saudi Arabian dress, Emirati dress or the Arab Gulf in general, the *'abāyah* should be distinctive because special attention is paid to it. It is not just worn out of an obligation to *sharī'a* that is, for *sitr*, but also for reasons such as customs and tradition, and is also considered as 'Fashion.' However, this is not the case with the *chador*, for example, since that is a traditional dress without any development. This is so because the *chador* is purely *sharī'a* (observing *sharī'a*) and so refers to those who we call '*multazimat*' (women strictly observing *sharī'a*). With us, it is not the case: all women must wear the *'abāyah*, whether they are doing it to observe *sharī'a* or not. So our *'abāyah* does not only refer to tradition and *sharī'a*; it refers to *sharī'a*, customs and tradition, it is a national dress, and it is fashion.<sup>61</sup>

It is thus perhaps possible to argue that in the production(s) of Islamic national discourse, the *symbolism* of the *veil* supersedes the ideological function of *veiling* in general, since it is not worn out of an obligation to *sharī'a*. Indeed, the social practice of fashioning the *'abāyah* within the context of its enforcement functions as a means of self-fashioning, for, as Silverman contends, 'clothing is a necessary condition of subjectivity – that in articulating the body it simultaneously articulates the psyche.'<sup>62</sup> In this context, therefore, the *'abāyah*-as-fashion can be found, as Macleod argues with reference to the new *veiling* practice in Cairo, in Gramsci's notion of hegemony: it 'points to the problem of the endurance of power relations which constrain and limit people's lives,' where hegemony 'is framed as ideological control and manipulation by the dominant group, in the interests of the dominant



group, as the creation of a false consciousness.’<sup>63</sup> Macleod continues to explain that, whilst her analysis would indicate that the situation of the new *veiling* in Cairo offers a prototype of hegemonic control, since women herein reproduce their own inequality, this practice is not in fact ‘an attempt to revert to tradition,’ and therefore signifies ‘a form of struggle’ as opposed to ‘pure domination.’<sup>64</sup> As established, references to a ‘general oldness’ in the use of retro foreground the extent to which the concept of fashion is privileged over *veiling* within the system of the ‘*abāyah*-as-fashion, where the re-inscription of *talli*, for example, does not necessarily signify a reversion to authenticity or an embrace of ‘tradition.’ Building on Macleod’s study, whilst the socio-legal implementation of the ‘*abāyah*’ by the state embodies a classic case of hegemony, fashioning the ‘*abāyah*, on the other hand, comes to signify ‘a form of struggle’ as ‘opposed to pure domination.’

Halima Al-Shamry observes the working of this concept in practice when she states:

Currently, ‘*abāyahs* have evolved in form and in colour to avoid uniformity, and to add a sense of individuality, as well as a form of avoiding the feeling that it is a socially imposed dress code. So we try to add style to an ‘*abāyah*’ to help woman accept it instead of her feeling that it is imposed. You might be a *muḥajjabah* but your dress code follows fashion. Girls love fashion and are obsessed with it, so if you make them wear a traditional-looking ‘*abāyah*, they will get rid of it the first chance they get.’<sup>65</sup>

In reading a form of protest into the ‘*abāyah*-as-fashion, Al-Shamry’s argument posits women as existing in acquiescent relation to the hegemonic order, such that by extension, in Macleod’s words, ‘their efforts are those of the subordinate – manipulations, negotiations, evasions.’<sup>66</sup> She adds, however, that ‘Their actions seek



to influence but not to confront or change the existing discourse.’<sup>67</sup> Whilst the ‘*abāyah*-as-fashion can be understood as a form of passive resistance it nonetheless modifies the hegemonic order of Islamic patriarchy in its subversion of the control and censure of female display. Macleod posits the new *veiling* in Cairo as a renegotiation of power, and draws on Foucault to read this site as a political struggle inscribed on the body. As discussed in my introduction, Foucault’s thesis on the contingency and contestability of power does not elaborate on the particulars of resistance, where Butler explains how Foucault neglects to identify ‘the specific mechanisms of how the subject is formed in submission.’<sup>68</sup> She extends his thesis to interrogate the manner in which an alteration of power delivers resistance in terms of ‘reiteration’ so as to establish what she describes as ‘the ambivalent scene of agency.’<sup>69</sup>

In Chapter Three, I demonstrated with reference to Butler how the detachment of the *veil* from the *Muslim female subject* rendered the transference of the *veil* on screen an act which denaturalizes the institutionalization of modesty in Iranian cinema, primarily by evading the very prerequisite that has come to govern her representation on screen. The use of the shaved head and costume substitution can therefore be seen as constituting ‘a contingent construction of meaning,’ with contingency situated in relation to the maintenance of modesty codes.<sup>70</sup> Manifestations of the ‘*abāyah*-as-fashion that preserve its essential qualities operate in a relation of contingency to its preservation and implementation and can also been seen to function with reference to what Butler deems as ‘style’ having a history, which condition and limit the articulation of gendered subjectivities.’<sup>71</sup> The ‘*abāyah*-



as-fashion can here be deemed to contest 'the hegemonic construct' and thus deprives the hegemonic order of its claims to the political regulation and determination of gender ideology, most significantly its control and censure of female display. Whilst the *veil*-as-supplement is both informed by and stands as a product of the hegemonic order, it nonetheless displaces and denaturalizes the political regulation of gender governed by the hegemonic order of Islamic patriarchy, namely through a parodic recontextualization of Islamic national dress through fashion.<sup>72</sup>

Building on the particulars of resistance within the Foucaultian formula, Butler contends that a transformation of power occurs where the act of appropriating power engenders 'an alteration of power such that the power assumed or appropriated works against the power that made that assumption possible.'<sup>73</sup> She adds, 'the power assumed remains tied to those conditions, but in an ambivalent way; in fact, the power assumed may at once retain and resist that subordination.'<sup>74</sup> Butler thus avers that it is within this ambivalence that the operation of agency is then formed.<sup>75</sup> To adapt Butler for the purpose of this analysis, it could be suggested that in the transference of the *veil*, the *Muslim female subject* is both autonomous and constrained by the function and the symbolism of the *veil*. This is primarily manifest in the manner in which the mobility of the *veil* is dependent upon the structures of Islamic female modesty in its ultimate resistance against transgression. In the case of the shaved head and costume substitution, an appropriation of power can be located in as far as these manifestations uphold the codes of modesty. However, they simultaneously stand as alterations of power in their evasion of the *veil*'s materiality.



In the case of the '*abāyah*-as-fashion, an appropriation of power is situated in as far as the symbolism of the *veil* is perpetually restored, whilst an alteration of power is manifest in its displacement of the codes of modesty.

The '*abāyah*-as-fashion, therefore, in working against the power that made its execution possible, both 'retains' and 'resists' subordination in this particular context. This is especially evident in the overt sexualization of dress, which resist 'the hegemonic construct' whilst simultaneously retaining subordination in their perpetual re-inscription of the *veil*. Drawing on Butler, therefore, it could be argued that through fashion, the power that *Muslim female subject* is 'compelled to reiterate turns against itself during the course of reiteration.'<sup>76</sup> The '*abāyah*-as-fashion does constitute a form of resistance and hence a reiteration of power, one that can be seen to modify the existing discourse in its transformation of 'the hegemonic construct of dress' and its subversion of the regulation of female display. It is here, in the ambivalence of the '*abāyah*-as-fashion, in its promotion of female display and its potential as a site for the articulation of gendered subjectivities, that the question of agency can be located.'<sup>77</sup>

In Chapter One I referenced Fanon's contention that the *haïk* 'is a uniform which tolerates no modification, no variant' when explaining Duvivier's representation of the native women as being indistinguishable from each other. I further argued that in *The Battle of Algiers*, the *haïk* is similarly rendered an entity which tolerates no modification,' with variation engendered only through its absence or the act of *unveiling*. Agency in these films is posited as external to the structures of the *veil*



and hence outside the parameters of the codes of modesty. My analysis of the 'abāyah-as-fashion presents a contrary formation of agency, since in this instance agency does not necessitate the removal of the *veil* and hence operates within the structures of the *veil* and its implementation. Moreover, Fanon's claim that the *veil* (*haik*) 'is a uniform which tolerates no modification, no variant' is here utterly inverted, for the manifestations of the 'abāyah through fashion show that both modification and variation are tolerated in the context of the uniform of Islamic national dress and its implementation by the state.

In the productions of Islamic national discourse, therefore, the *Muslim female subject* embodies what De Certeau's calls the 'art of being in between,' for whilst the examples referred to throughout this analysis predominantly signify 'immodesty,' the fact that the signifier of the *veil* is perpetually preserved inevitably upholds its inherent association with modesty.<sup>78</sup> The 'patriarchal bargains' operating within the hegemonic order acknowledge that '*power relationships* define the network in which they are described and delimit the circumstances from which they can profit.'<sup>79</sup> It could thus be argued that, in the articulation of an immodest modesty, the languages of dissent 'intervene in a field which regulates them at a first level ... but they introduce into it a way of turning it to their advantage that obeys other rules and constitutes something like a second level interwoven into the first.'<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Ruba Al-Hassan for providing this information, courtesy of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Abu Dhabi, 2007.



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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., UNDP, Abu Dhabi (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Chatterjee (1993), p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Qatar-based *Al-Mottahajiba* first opened as a small retail shop in 1984 and by 2004 had established seven branches of their boutique in Qatar, five in the UAE, two in Bahrain and one in Kuwait, while also hosting annual fashion shows in Doha. Saudi Arabian fashion house *Midnight*, first established in 1988, now has seven boutiques in Saudi Arabia and two in the UAE. By 2004, UAE-based *Sweet Lady*, established in 1993, developed six boutiques in the country and hosts annual fashion shows. *Bedoon Ism*, set up in Saudi Arabia in 1985 now has seventy-five branches in the country.

<sup>12</sup> I have chosen to refer to the works of Sheikh Bin Baz who is regarded as one of the most influential religious figures in contemporary *Sunni* thought. I also refer to Youssef Al-Qaradawy who, as a result of his religious programmes, is a very visible figure in contemporary popular discourse in the Arab world.

<sup>13</sup> Yeğenoğlu (1998), pp. 118–9.

<sup>14</sup> Ossman (2002), p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Whilst there are no direct connections between *veiling* and the colour black in the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*, herein rendering its significance cultural as opposed to theological, an excerpt from a lecture by the religious scholar Sheikh Bin Baz concerning the prohibition of make-up and the necessity of veiling could be interpreted as initiating the relationship between veiling and the colour black. 'Muslim women complied with the instructions of Allāh and His prophet, and they began to wear the *hijāb* and cover themselves from strangers. Ibn Dawood relates this statement from Umu-Salamah (the prophet's wife): 'When this *āyah* [verse] was revealed, the women of *Al-Ansār* came out as if crows were on their heads from all the covers, and they wore black covers.' With regards to the Muslim female subject having to cover her face, Bin Baz argues the following from the verse *Al-Ahzāb*: 'O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And Allāh is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.' He then argues: 'Allāh says: "(33:59)...that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such)", which indicates the face specifically, because the face is *the feature by which a person is known*. Thus it explicitly instructs the *veiling/covering (sitr)* of the face; and Allāh also says: "(33:59)... and not molested", which indicates that *identifying* the charms of a woman (*mahāsin*) is harmful to her (*eedhāa/molestation*) and to others, through seduction (*fitmah*) and evil, and so Allāh has forbidden women from revealing the charms of their bodies, whatever they may be. If there had been no other legal (*shara'i*) evidence against unveiling (*kashf*) the face except for this one verse (33:59) from Allāh, it would be sufficient evidence in favour of obligating women to wear the *hijāb* and cover their charms (*mafātin*) amongst which is her face, the most prominent of all her charms, as it is *what identifies her* and it is the source of seduction (*fitmah*) [emphases added].' Whilst there are no direct scriptural references prohibiting the *Muslim female subject* from distinguishing herself from others through her attire, Bin Baz's interpretation of *Al-Ahzāb* can be interpreted with reference to the notion of individualism through dress. Moreover, whilst his argument concerns the face, distinction in attire is similarly rendered a 'feature by which a person is known' and, moreover, that which 'identifies her.' However, the contention that uniformity of dress is essential to the practice of *veiling*, since in distinguishing herself from others through her attire the *Muslim female subject* is both 'identified' and 'known', continues to remain under-explored in the field of Islamic jurisprudence. Abd-al-Aziz ibn Abd-Allah ibn Baaz, 'The Legality of The *Hijāb*' (*Mashrū'iyat Al-Hijāb*) (no date):

<http://www.binbaz.org.sa/index.php?pg=mat&type=article&id=261>

<sup>19</sup> I borrow the term 'stylistic deviance' from Gaines (1990), p. 206.

<sup>20</sup> Ossman (2002), p. 56.

<sup>21</sup> El Guindi (1999), p. 143.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



- <sup>23</sup> Baalbaki (1992), p. 268.
- <sup>24</sup> Abd-Allah ibn Baaz, 'The Legality of The *Hijāb*' (*Mashrū'iyat Al-Hijāb*) (no date): <http://www.binbaz.org.sa/index.php?pg=mat&type=article&id=261>
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Al-Qaradawy, *The Status of Woman in Islam* (1993): [http://www.ymsite.com/books/O\\_WI/default.htm](http://www.ymsite.com/books/O_WI/default.htm)
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> *Fatwa 21352 in Laha* (no date): <http://www.lahaonline.com/index-counsels.php?option=content&task=view&id=2651&sectionid=2>
- <sup>33</sup> Fashion designer Halima Al-Shamry further explains that there are 'purely *shar'iyah* 'abāyahs,' which are 'black, wide, all covering and lacking in any embroidery (*zarkashah*),' which women wear in un-segregated areas. However, during evening events and private gatherings and 'women only events... we are not particular about wearing the 'abāyah al-shar'iyah.' Interview with Halima Al-Shamry, General Manager for *Fashion Top* 4 June 2006, Al-Riyadh.
- <sup>34</sup> For a discussion on liquid detergents for 'abāyahs in liquid detergent and the paradox between references to whiteness and the colour black as the signifier see Appendix E
- <sup>35</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), p. 257.
- <sup>36</sup> For more on the *bisht* and *shmāgh*, see Nancy Lindisfarne-Tapper and Bruce Ingham, eds, *Languages of Dress in the Middle East* (London: Curzon, 1997), p. 150.
- <sup>37</sup> Al-Qaradawy, *The Status of Woman in Islam* (1993): [http://www.ymsite.com/books/O\\_WI/default.htm](http://www.ymsite.com/books/O_WI/default.htm)
- <sup>38</sup> Halima Al-Shamry, General Manager for *Fashion Top*, Personal Interview, conducted 4 June 2006, Al-Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- <sup>39</sup> Kaja Silverman, 'Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse,' in Tania Modleski, ed., *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 139–52, p. 150.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 150–1.
- <sup>42</sup> Barthes (1990), p. 257.
- <sup>43</sup> Silverman (1986), pp. 150–1.
- <sup>44</sup> Navaro-Yashin (2002), pp. 221–53, p. 222.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 223.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 234, p. 246.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 246–7.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 247.
- <sup>49</sup> Culler (1994), p. 103.
- <sup>50</sup> Barthes (1990), p. 273.
- <sup>51</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with Patriarchy,' *Gender and Society*, Volume 2, Number 3 (September 1988), pp. 274–90, p. 275.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 275.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 283.
- <sup>55</sup> Arlene Elowe Macleod, *Accommodating Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling, and Change in Cairo* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1992), p. 97.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 110.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 111.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 124.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>61</sup> Interview Halima Al-Shamry (2006), Al-Riyadh.
- <sup>62</sup> Silverman (1986), p. 147.



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- <sup>63</sup> Macleod (1992), pp. 125–6.  
<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 126.  
<sup>65</sup> Interview with Halima Al-Shamry (2006), Al-Riyadh.  
<sup>66</sup> Macleod (1992), p. 151.  
<sup>67</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>68</sup> Butler (1997), p. 2.  
<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp. 12–5.  
<sup>70</sup> Butler (1990), p. 139.  
<sup>71</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.138.  
<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p.13  
<sup>74</sup> Butler (1997), p. 13.  
<sup>75</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.12.  
<sup>77</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>78</sup> De Certeau (1984), p. 30.  
<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 34.  
<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 30.



## Conclusion: A Case for the *Boyahs* Strategic Contingencies and the Mobility of the *Veil* in Discourse

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Butler's conception of the 'performative,' which delivers gender, along with sex and sexuality, as a manufactured set of repeated acts posited through the gendered stylization of the body, is enacted through the structures of the '*abāyah*'s socio-legal implementation in the United Arab Emirates.<sup>1</sup> An example of what Butler deems a 'parodic identity' is what has recently become known as the *boyah* identity, which is indicative of the emergent visibility of a growing subculture within the Arab Gulf States. A lexicalization of the English 'boy' followed by the Arabic feminine suffix '*ah*,' *boyah* is a term employed within local popular discourse to refer to the sexual self-stylizations of butch/femme identities. The *boyah*-'*abāyah*' is formed of a re-appropriation of men's national dress (*kandoura/dishdāsha*) translated into the '*abāyah*' itself, effecting a combination of male and female institutionalized national dress. Unlike the 'boyish look' presented in the '*abāyah*-as-fashion, discussed in Chapter Four, the *boyah*-'*abāyah*' constitutes a direct replication of men's national dress, manifested most significantly in the cut and the fabric. Other references include the high collar, straight sleeves and buttoned cuffs. Whilst this manifestation constitutes the body *veil*, there are other instances, where the *shailah* (head *veil*) is substituted, with a baseball cap or the *shmāgh* (men's chequered head dress) (Figure 6.1). Whilst the '*abāyah*-as-fashion is bought or tailored at fashion houses, the *boyah*-'*abāyah*' is thought to be made at men's tailors.





Figure 6.1: *Boyah Stylizations* (2006)

As with the '*abāyah*-as-fashion, the *boyah*-'*abāyah* constitutes a direct substitution of the *veil* (something complete in itself) through preserving the '*abāyah*'s essential qualities (long, black), which, as established in Chapter Four, implies that the visual signifier of female modesty continues to be maintained despite its appropriation of male national dress. The codes of modesty continue to be maintained by 'proxy.' The use of the baseball cap and the *shmāgh* act as direct replacements for the *shailah* and ensure, in their concealment of hair, that modesty codes are maintained. Furthermore, the baseball cap and the *shmāgh*, like the shaved head and costume substitution, are exterior to the *veil* (*shailah*) in as far as their materiality remains 'foreign' and unrelated to it.

The transference of the *veil* through the use of baseball caps and the *shmāgh* presents a case in which the visual signifier of Islamic ideology is once again detached from the *Muslim female subject*, as evinced in Chapter Three, where wigs, hats and turtlenecks were shown to evade the symbolism of the *veil* on screen. Although, in retaining the essential qualities of the '*abāyah*, the *boyah*-'*abāyah* upholds the signifier of Islamic national identity, in replacing the *shailah* with the *shmāgh*, the symbol of Islamic codes of modesty is here replaced with that of masculine national identity (refer to Figure 6.2). The transference of the *veil* in the self-stylizations of



*boyah* identities draws on the manifold substitutions and evasions of the *veil* discussed throughout this study: by ‘proxy,’ where the *function* of the *veil* is maintained through substitution (baseball cap, *shmāgh*), and ‘sign,’ where the *symbolism* of the *veil* is upheld in its preservation (long, black).



Figure 6.2: *Boyah* - *shmāgh*

In as far as the Derridean supplement implies an initial deficiency in the entity that is being replaced, the *boyah*-’*abāyah* as a supplement is comparable to the ’*abāyah*-as-fashion in as far as it mitigates for a uniformity enforced by the implementation of national dress, and thus provides a platform for the *Muslim female subject* to distinguish herself ‘on a single plane.’<sup>2</sup> The notion of equivalence is not only situated with reference to those who wear the ’*abāyah* but, moreover, to those who wear the same colour, as established in Chapter Four. Baseball caps and re-inscriptions of male clothing further contribute to an understanding of the ’*abāyah* as an element of embodied subjectivity and individual difference. Crucially, however, yet another deficiency in the *veil* can be located, which is the limited extent to which the material *veil* stands as a visual signifier of a gender norm.

My reading of the gendering scene in *The Day I Became a Woman* in Chapter Two illustrated how, in light of Butler, *veiling* is represented as ‘a forcible citation of a norm,’ where Hava donning the *veil* constitutes ‘the embodiment of a certain ideal of



femininity.’ I extended this discussion with further reference to Butler, who argues that femininity is ‘not the product of choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment.’<sup>3</sup> In *Daughters of the Sun*, the material *veil* – a visual signifier of a gender norm – is evaded through a ‘parodic recontextualization’ of the *veil*: the shaved head. The use of the shaved head compensates for the deficiency presented by the material *veil* of precluding the gender transformation of the protagonist from taking place within the narrative. The shaved head is thus constituted as a supplement in as far as it replaces the lack initiated by the material *veil* and, by extension, displaces the visual signifier of gender on screen. In as far as *boyah* stylizations are concerned, it could be argued that a similar enactment is materially evinced within social and popular discourse. The baseball cap and the *shmāgh* displace the visual signifier of gender posited by the *shailah* and therein provide a platform for enactments of gendered identities that would otherwise be precluded by the *veil*. The *shmāgh*, however, which also constitutes a visual signifier of a gender norm, occasions the expression of gendered ambiguities in replacing the *shailah*.

The *boyah* identity embodies what Judith Halberstam has termed ‘female masculinity,’ in as far as the definition of masculinity is here ‘articulated in terms of the *expression* of maleness [emphasis added],’ namely, the translation of male national dress within the discursive structures of female national dress and its socio-legal implementation by the state.<sup>4</sup> Halberstam argues, however, that the way in which dominant cultures ‘contained the threat that the mannish woman represented to hegemonic masculinity was to absorb female masculinity into the dominant



structures,' adding that, 'such an explanation assumes that manliness is built partly on the vigorous disavowal of female masculinity in imitation of the female masculinity it claims to have rejected.'<sup>5</sup> As cited in Chapter Four, the Islamic prescriptions of ideological constructions of femininity and dress prohibit references to masculinity. The cleric Al-Qaradawy contends that 'a woman is not to wear a man's garment; a man is not to wear a woman's garment,' and that Allāh condemns a mannish woman.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Halberstam's contention regarding the accommodation of female masculinity by the masculine hegemonic order, and its assimilation into the dominant structures, is especially acute when applied to the sexual self-stylizations of *boyah* identities. The preservation of the '*abāyah*'s essential qualities (long, black) and its symbolism are the very features through which masculinity is accommodated by the hegemonic order of Islamic patriarchy. In other words, the disavowal of masculinity is absorbed in its manifestation within the structures of Islamic national female dress, such that as a result the *boyah*-'*abāyah*' is rendered an imitation of the (female) masculinity that the hegemonic order claims to have rejected. The preservation of the symbolism of the *veil* in the '*abāyah*-as-fashion allows for the expression of female display and the disruption of modesty codes, in the case of the *boyah*-'*abāyah*' the same principles enable the subversion of gendered identities.

Indeed, this latter observation stands as a paradigmatic example of Butler's contention, after Foucault, that gendered identities are discursively constituted through 'regulative discourses.'<sup>7</sup> Once again, this '*style* of the flesh' has a 'history,' for the implementation of the '*abāyah*' and the preservation of its symbolism both



limit and condition the articulation of gender on the surface of the body. The *boyah-abāyah* constitutes 'a contingent construction of meaning,' with contingency situated in direct relation to both the codes of modesty (baseball cap/*shmāgh*) and the enforcement and preservation of the *'abāyah*. As a supplement of the *veil*, the *boyah-'abāyah* continues to be informed by and stands as a product of the hegemonic order of Islamic patriarchy, yet its enactment transforms the political regulation of gender norms through a parodic recontextualization of Islamic national dress. The *boyah-'abāyah* both 'retains' and 'resists' its own subordination, for it contests both 'the hegemonic construct' of dress and the political regulation of gender ideology in its reaffirmation of the *expression* of masculinity. Drawing on Butler, therefore, *boyah* identities come to embody the ambivalent site of agency, since the power that the *Muslim female subject* 'is compelled to reiterate turns against itself during the course of that reiteration.'<sup>8</sup> The political regulation of gender norms through the implementation of national dress is here transformed, and thus reiterated, through a re-signification of the *veil*, which in turn notably disrupts the forcible citation of a norm that is implemented by society and the state.

As discussed in my introduction, Butler's 'non-voluntarist' model of agency has been censured for its disregard of historical and social specificity and for its limited value in practice. McNay, who advocates an active and autonomous conception of agency, argues that Butler's account of subject formation remains abstract in its concern with 'symbolic structures,' and as a result not only forecloses an understanding of agency within the context of lived and material relations but, moreover, fails to engage with the way that individuals come to engender change.<sup>9</sup>



She further contends that the appropriation of the Foucaultian model of identity formation is in essence problematic, primarily in the extent to which 'the negative moment of subjection' is given theoretical privilege within this construction.<sup>10</sup> It is here important to reiterate that this study is not concerned with the transformation of power within the context of lived subjectivities, for the *Muslim female subject* is here constituted as a product and effect of the discourses of colonialism, nationalism and Islamic patriarchy. McNay's criticism of the 'negative paradigm of subjectification' is nonetheless worth extending, since agency in this study is located '*within* the constraining norms,' which in light of McNay may seem at the outset to privilege the institutionalization of *veiling*, which comprises 'the negative moment of subjection.'<sup>11</sup>

Earlier, I discussed how Zayzafoon accuses Fanon of rendering the *veil* 'a constitutive element of the Algerian woman's corporeal pattern.'<sup>12</sup> Appropriating Yeğenoğlu's *veil*/hymen analogy, which delivers the *veil* as *différance*, I argued that Fanon's claim continues to be valuable for the way in which it delivers the colonial discursive structure from which the *Muslim female body* emerges. Although my constitution of the *Muslim female subject* is posited within the dialectic of autonomy and constraint, locating agency within 'regulative discourse,' this formulation does not uphold the patriarchal claim that the *veil* is a constitutive element of female corporeality. Rather, in formulating the subject through the discourses of the *veil* (maintaining modesty and resisting transgression), this analysis resists the pitfalls of situating the subject outside of this discursive frame, which would in effect be to endorse the assumption that the not-veiled *body* constitutes the truth of female



corporeality. As this study has demonstrated, the paradigm of *unveiling* delivers the exhaustive signification of the *unveiled Muslim female* body as the site of female emancipation, voice and visibility. The predicament of the *unveiling* paradigm, therefore, not only upholds a view that the not-veiled body constitutes truth, and thus the norm, but moreover delivers the *unveiled* body as *the* site in which the question of agency is to be found. Such a model of agency (and its over-representation) is not only pernicious for being indissociable from its colonial past, but more importantly for simultaneously foreclosing the (ambivalent) sites in which agency *can* be located.<sup>13</sup>

Previously I referred to McClintock, who writes that essentially the *veil* constitutes ‘the sign of women’s servitude,’ and argued that such a claim does not only deny the semiotic mutability of the *veil* but also proves ineffectual in as far as establishing a site for political intervention is concerned. I contended that, within the context of contemporary postcoloniality, it is not possible to assign the *veil* an essentialist meaning, for it is semiotically overloaded and as such does not lend itself as a site for the inscription of provenance and essential truth. Drawing on Butler, I argued that rendering the *veil* as a sign of women’s servitude is to offer it as a totalizing concept, where once again the truth of female corporeality is reiterated under the sign of the ‘universal.’ As a conclusion to this study, I extend this observation in relation to the paradigm of *unveiling*, which, if upheld as a model for agency and a site for political intervention, would not only instigate the reproduction of a colonial hegemonic power, but also preclude any other claims for the mobility of the *veil*.<sup>14</sup>



A recent example of such an obstacle to the mobility of the *veil* follows a statement made by Egypt's Cultural Minister, Farouk Hosni, in November 2006. In an article for the website *Arab News*, 'Wanted: Open Debate on the Veil,' Linda Heard explains how Hosni caused a public furor when he openly criticized the *veil* as follows: 'There was an age when our mothers went to university and worked without the veil. It is in that spirit that we grew up, so why this regression?'<sup>15</sup> Heard describes how this statement precipitated a huge backlash, with 130 parliamentarians and angry student demonstrators around the country demanding Hosni's resignation, while others suggested that he be tried for disparaging Islam. Heard writes,

In last week's column I criticized European politicians for their condemnations of the veil and their attempts to ban the niqab or burqa [*sic*] on the grounds that in a democracy citizens should be able to wear whatever they please within the constraints of decency.

Some of my readers, therefore, may find it odd that at the same time I agree with [those] who defend Farouk Hosni's stance in the name of free speech.

There is a fundamental difference between, say, Britain's Jack Straw and his preference for female constituents to turn up at his office unveiled and comments made by Farouk Hosni.<sup>16</sup>

Heard hereby sets a critical distinction between Straw and Hosni, delivering their positions on the *veil* in terms of cultural and geographic specificity, and hence fundamental ideological disparity. She contends that Straw, as a politician in the West, is almost by definition 'following an agenda or driven by xenophobia,' whilst Hosni 'has a perfect right to speak out concerning the trends within his own religion inside his own country.'<sup>17</sup> On the contrary, I believe such naïve distinctions collapse



under the sign of the *veil*, which does not permit such nuances; both criticisms of the *veil* and the claim to 'free speech' in this context invariably emerge as totalizing concepts that are always already framed as a property of imperialism.

Throughout the period of researching this study, I became increasingly curious as to whether one can speak of the *veil*'s mobility or represent its evasion outside the paradigm of *unveiling* and its discourses. This has required a critical exploration of the historical discursive productions of the *Muslim female subject* and a reappraisal of the *veil* in its rendition of the *Muslim female body* as always embodying the interior. My analysis has found that the mobility of the *veil* through transference and evasion – and hence outside the process of *unveiling* – is achievable. The *veil*-as-supplement is delivered as a site in which the grammar, rhetoric and oppositional structuring of *veiling/unveiling* that has come to inform the removal of the *veil* can finally be transcended. Although this observation may provide a justification for the *veil*'s mobility in representation and social practices, is it possible to establish a similar understanding of the *veil*'s mobility in political discourse in light of the contemporary debate on the *veil*? In other words, how can we speak of/for the *veil*'s mobility and, moreover, establish a *veil* discourse that could transcend the hegemonic archives of imperialism that have come to both govern and inform the removal of the *veil*?

In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, Butler equates the theory of performativity with the theory of hegemony, where she explains how in both cases 'new social possibilities emerge – at various levels of



social action through a collaborative relation of power.’<sup>18</sup> Sarah Salih explains that, although Butler’s more recent writing does not privilege the dominant structures as emphatically as her earlier work, she nonetheless continues to identify ‘the unintended meanings and non-intentional effects of discourse,’ maintaining that ‘resistance and domination are implicated and perhaps even impossible to distinguish from each other.’<sup>19</sup> She adds, Butler’s contention that,

translation rather than metalanguage, contingency and the local rather than universality and the global will provide the conditions of possibility for an ongoing democratic project of contestation whereby the terms that constitute us are simultaneously deployed, deconstructed, and reiterated.<sup>20</sup>

Against Heard’s account above, I am not suggesting that a critical intervention to locate a site for the *veil*’s mobility is unfeasible, but rather, as I hope this study demonstrates, I contend that such a project ought to be situated against what Butler presents as the political value of ‘strategic contingency,’ which transcends universal norms and values. My examination of the transference of the *veil* delivers the *veil*-as-supplement as the ambivalent site of agency, one whose enactment transforms the political regulation of gender ideology through parodic recontextualizations of the *veil*. In a similar vein, I argue that a (writing/speaking) position which advocates the mobility of the *veil* ought also to be posited in contingent relation to the structures of the *veil*, so to circumvent the established colonial narratives which continue to dominate its evasion. Hosni’s reading of Egypt’s turn to *hyperveiling* as a ‘regression’ constitutes a reenactment of this historical narrative in the contemporary moment, where, as illustrated in Chapter One, colonial discourses that uphold the



*veil* as a site of barbarity and call for its evasion only engender a derivative discourse of *veiling* as a product of the anti-imperialist project. A reading of the ambivalent site of agency formed within the structures of the *veil* can thus be framed within Butler's 'ongoing democratic project of contestation,' where translation and contingency in this instance take precedence over the global and the universal, and where resistance and domination are inextricably connected and indistinguishable from one another.

It is here important to stress that my endeavour to reconfigure the *Muslim female subject* and interrogate the extent to which she can exist not-*veiled* is not an attempt to liberate the subject, nor does it uphold a model of agency which should of necessity be followed. Rather, reconfiguring the subject within the structures of modesty and transgression is a process of contestation in itself, one that advocates the *veil*'s mobility be understood to exclude the process of *unveiling*, so that the terms that constitute the subject 'are simultaneously deployed, deconstructed, and reiterated.'<sup>21</sup> Following this, it is pertinent to return to Chow's censure of discourses that attempt to dismantle the apparatus of colonial domination and her scepticism of restorative efforts and pursuits in the reinvention of subjectivity.<sup>22</sup> In Chapter One, I cited Mohanty's criticism of Foucault's power/resistance paradigm, where I argued that the way in which Alloula, Garanger and Pontecorvo confront the violence of colonialism as a 'return,' sustains the hegemony of colonial power by upholding the very apparatus through which violence is engendered. I extended this observation in Chapter Three with reference to Kiarostami, where I argued that he presents a similar stance in rendering the *unveiled* shaved head a response to the



institutionalization of modesty in Iranian cinema. I would like to emphasize that, whilst I argue that the *veil*'s mobility should be situated outside the process of *unveiling*, this thesis is not posited as a direct response to the colonial narrative of the *veil*, which would be to sustain the hegemony of colonial power. As I have established, to reconfigure the *Muslim female subject* in this sense is not a restorative effort, but a transformative process. My call for the transference of the *veil*, and claim that its mobility runs counter to the paradigm of *unveiling*, do not constitute a direct replacement of an existing discourse but an attempt to transcend it by circumventing the exhaustive paradigms that have come to inundate and govern the *Muslim female subject*. The enactments of *boyah* identities are one example of a transformative discourse in practice. The *boyah* -'*abāyah* effects the reaffirmation of sexual identities through re-signification and reiteration and thus challenges the Emirati nationalist paradigm in its governance of gender by displacing the political regulation of sexual norms.

Thus, to speak of the need to dismantle gender hierarchy is a universal assertion, one that ought continually to be advanced as a necessary project. However, Butler argues that no such project can be executed without the need for 'cultural translation,' as 'without translation, the only way the assertion of universality can cross a border is through a colonial and expansionistic logic.'<sup>23</sup> The stylizations of *boyah* identities deliver a rupture in the social field of gender hierarchy and disrupt the forcible citation of a norm in their re-signification of the '*abāyah*. Rendering this a site which contests gender hierarchy comprises a cultural translation, one that resists the



‘expansionistic logic’ of the paradigm of *unveiling* and rejects the not-veiled body as a model of bestowed agency.

I would now like to return to my abortive meeting with Al-Mutlaq, outlined in my introduction. At the time of our meeting I made no response when he signaled his clear disapproval of the fact that I was attempting to reconfigure the *Muslim female subject* in the West and in a Western language. As a result of my research and in concluding this study, I would now answer this suspicion in light of Butler’s emphasis on the political value of strategic contingency. I would argue that the mobility of the *veil* ‘is not speakable outside of a cultural language, but its articulation does not imply that an adequate language is available. It means only that when we speak its name, we do not escape our language, although we can – and must – push the limits.’<sup>24</sup> In doing so, we shall ensure that the *Muslim female subject* is not ‘left alone.’

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<sup>1</sup> Salih and Butler (2004), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Ossman (2002), p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Butler (1993), pp. 231–2.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Qaradawy (1993).

<sup>7</sup> See Salih and Butler (2004), p. 90–4.

<sup>8</sup> Butler (1997), p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> McNay (2000), pp. 31–73, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Zayzafoon, (2005), p. 81.

<sup>13</sup> See Butler (1990), p.143.

<sup>14</sup> See Butler (1992), p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Linda Heard, ‘Open Debate on Veil,’ 28 November 2006:

<http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=89262&d=28&m=11&y=2006>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 14.



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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 41.



## APPENDIX A

### ‘Every Face Tells a Story’

This image from an advert for *Time Magazine* in *Business Week*, 20 September 2004, presents a group of women wearing the *veil* with their backs to the camera and their faces entirely obscured from view (Figure 7.1). A red frame suggesting the cover of *Time Magazine* punctuates one of the women against the group of anonymous figures. In conjunction with the caption, ‘Every face tells a story,’ this stands as an attempt to transcend the assumption that the *veil* renders the *Muslim female subject* undifferentiated and, to appropriate Frantz Fanon, that it ‘tolerates no modification, no variant.’<sup>1</sup>

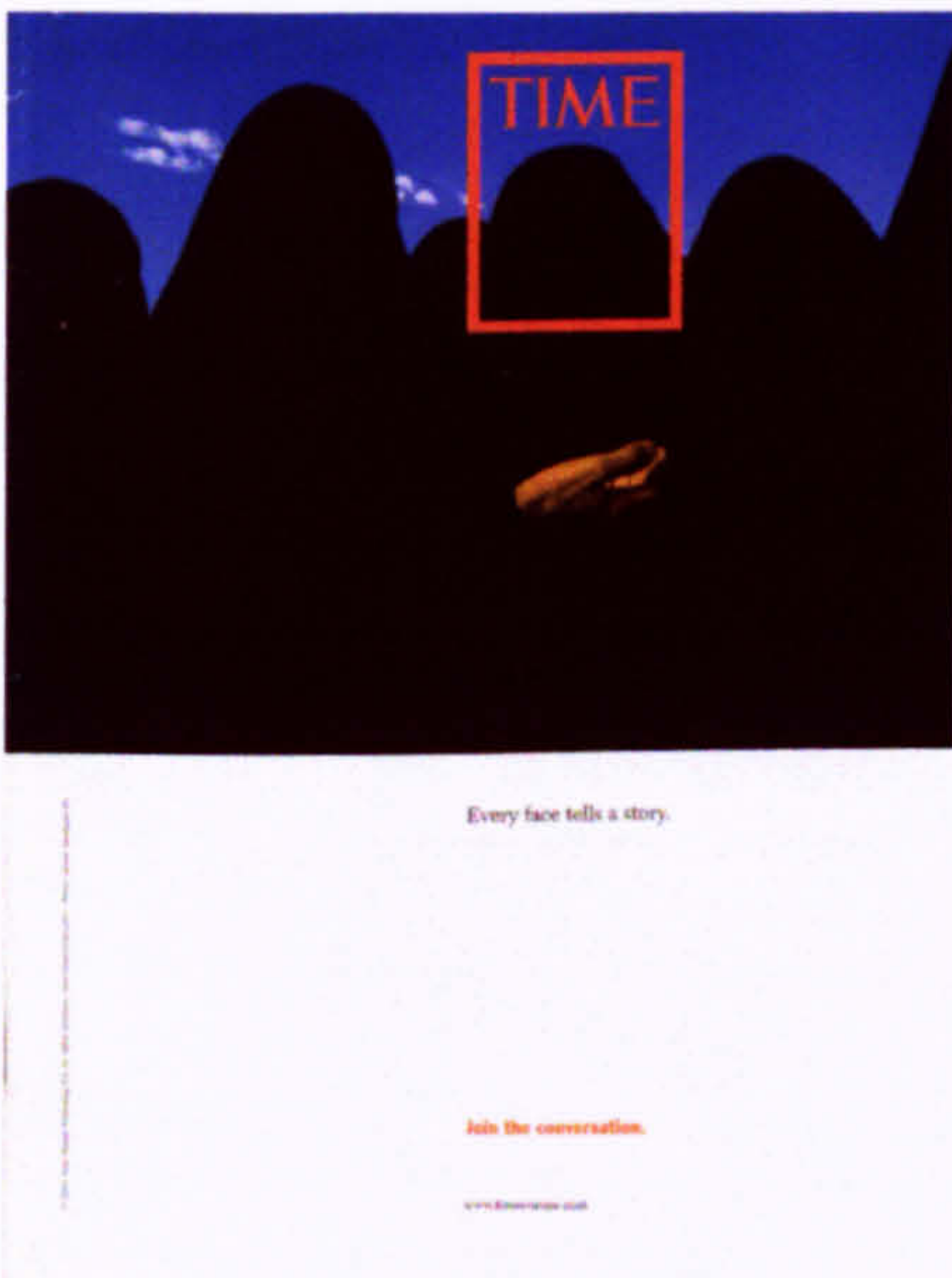


Figure 7.1: *Business Week*, 20 Sept 2004

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<sup>1</sup> Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove, 1965), p. 36.



## APPENDIX B

### The *Muslim Female Subject* as a Panoptically-Positioned Observer

Turkish Cypriot fashion designer Hussein Chalayan presented the gaze of the *Muslim female subject* as a central element in his show, *Between* (Spring/Summer 1998) (Figure 7.2).<sup>1</sup> In an interview he discusses the issues that he finds most intriguing with regards to the *veil*:

The paradox of Islam is that the women wear the veils in order to eliminate their beauty and attractiveness. But the desire for anonymity works like a boomerang ... Who controls the gaze? The Muslim woman who surveys the world behind the veil or those who see her? ... I had the models come back in white chadors and fix the audience with a piercing stare that lasted several minutes. Women who regard you from behind the veil; it has an element of the threatening about it.<sup>2</sup>

The contention that the *Muslim female subject* is situated as a panoptically-positioned observer was here visually articulated by Chalayan through the use of women in white *chadors* who stared directly at the audience. *Between* also extended this effect as some of the models had egg-shaped capsules on their heads whilst others appeared with their heads framed by square mirrors. A publication that accompanied an exhibition on the designer at the Groninger Museum, Groningen, explains,

On the inside the models remained hidden from the gaze of others, whilst being able to scrutinize the outside world ... As a consequence, the voyeur's one sided relationship with his object changed into one of reciprocity.<sup>3</sup>



Whilst it is the question of the gaze that is central to this collection, at the end of the show Chalayan presented a group of women who appeared *veiled* to different degrees. In this instance, the *veiled/unveiled*, covered/uncovered opposition discussed in Chapter Two is evinced in its extremity, where the references to the *yashmak* (face cover) and the *chador* are opposed emphatically through the models' naked bodies.



Figure 7.2: *Between* (Spring/Summer, 1998)

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<sup>1</sup> Nathalie Khan provides the following commentary on Chalayan's show: 'Contrary to Western beliefs, Islamic culture does not see a contradiction between the religious and the sexual, but what Islamic culture does forbid is the public flaunting of the latter. The veiled but exposed models unravel a very Westernised idea of dress; the use of female Islamic dress and loss of modesty stands in direct opposition to the idea 'fashion being associated with sins of lust and pride.' Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson, eds., *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Exploration and Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> Sjarel Ex and José Teunissen, *WOMAN BY Vivienne Westwood, Christian Dior Couture, Maison Martin Margiela, Junya Watanabe, Ann Demeulemester, Veronique Leroy, Bernard Willhelm, Victor&Rolf, Hussein Chalayan* (Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 2003), p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Evans, Suzy Menkes, Ted Polhemus and Bradley Quinn, *Hussein Chalayan* (Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 2005), p. 30.



## APPENDIX C

### The Paradigm of Juxtaposed Signifiers

An example of the active/passive opposition in the construction of the *Muslim female subject* is proffered by a recent exhibition entitled *Musulmanes, Musulmans: Au Caire, à Téhéran, Istanbul, Paris, Dakar* held at le Parc de la Villette, Paris in 2004. The exhibition purports to examine what it is like to be Muslim in five different cities. The cover of the catalogue uses an image by photographer Reza Mottarian in which a woman wearing a *veil* and tracksuit is captured in action and centralized amongst a group of people playing football (Figure 7.3). The paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers in this composition is engendered through the combination of *veil* (passive) and football (active). In the context of the exhibition's intent to examine the paradoxes inherent in being Muslim today, the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers in this instance illustrates the seeming incongruity of a girl wearing the *veil* and playing football, which simultaneously attempts to transcend the cliché of the *Muslim female subject* as passive.

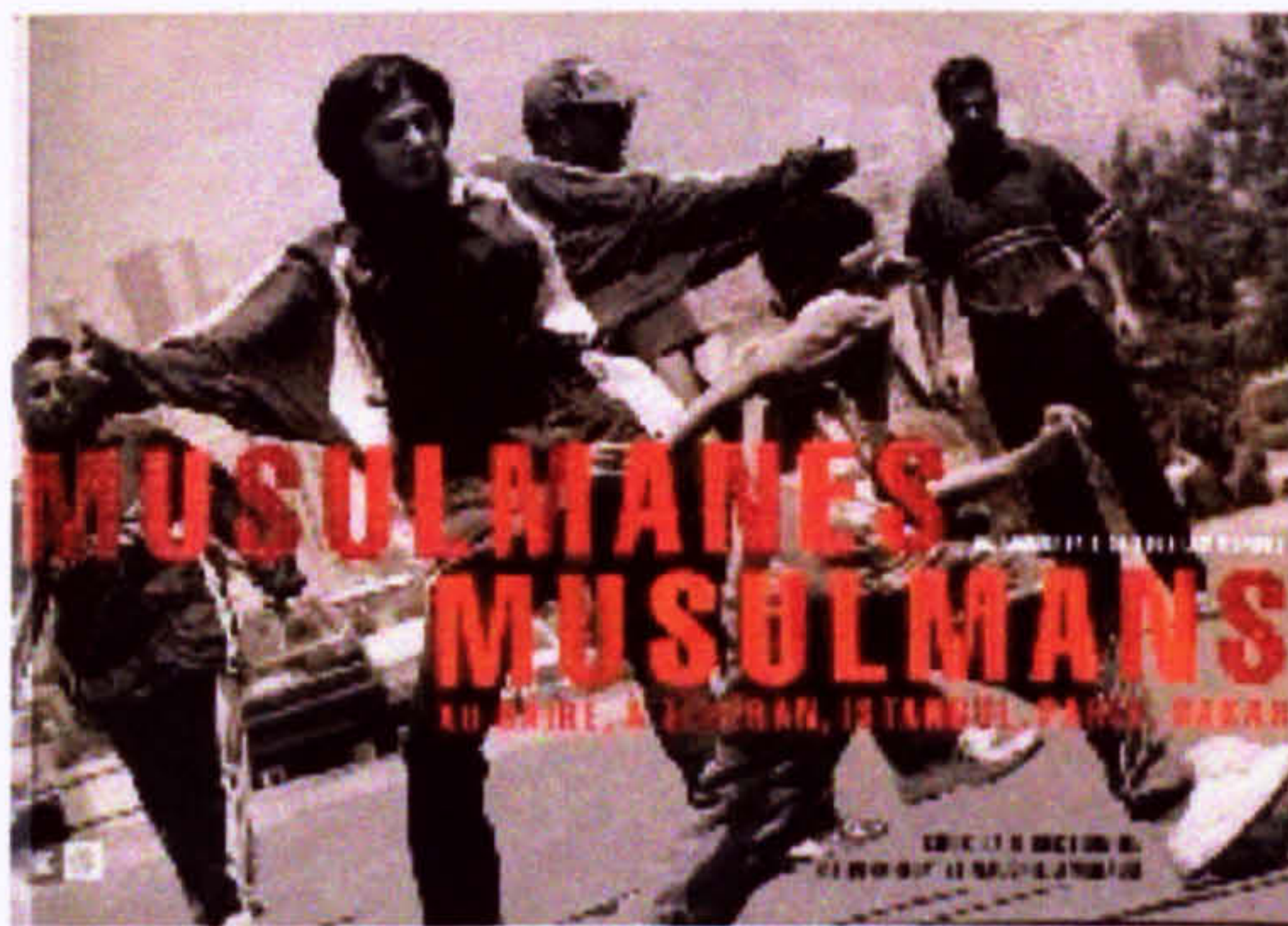


Figure 7.3: *Musulmanes, Musulmans* (2004)



A current example in which opposed notions of femininity are expressed through the paradigm of juxtaposed signifiers can be seen in an image for the exhibition *Sexy Souks* (La Maison des Cultures du Monde, Paris 2007) (Figure 7.4). Brightly coloured lingerie is superimposed upon the image of the *Muslim female subject* to engender the opposition covered/uncovered. Whilst opposed notions of femininity and modesty are expressed in this construction and dress is rendered the most dominant element within the image, references to lingerie, centralized in bold colours, once again create the sense that the *Muslim female subject* embodies an interiority. A preview for the exhibition appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* under the heading, *Islam Uncovered*.<sup>1</sup> The visual construction here extends the rendition of the *Muslim female subject* as a metonym for Islam, established by the title, with the image strongly suggesting the uncovering of the *Muslim female subject*.

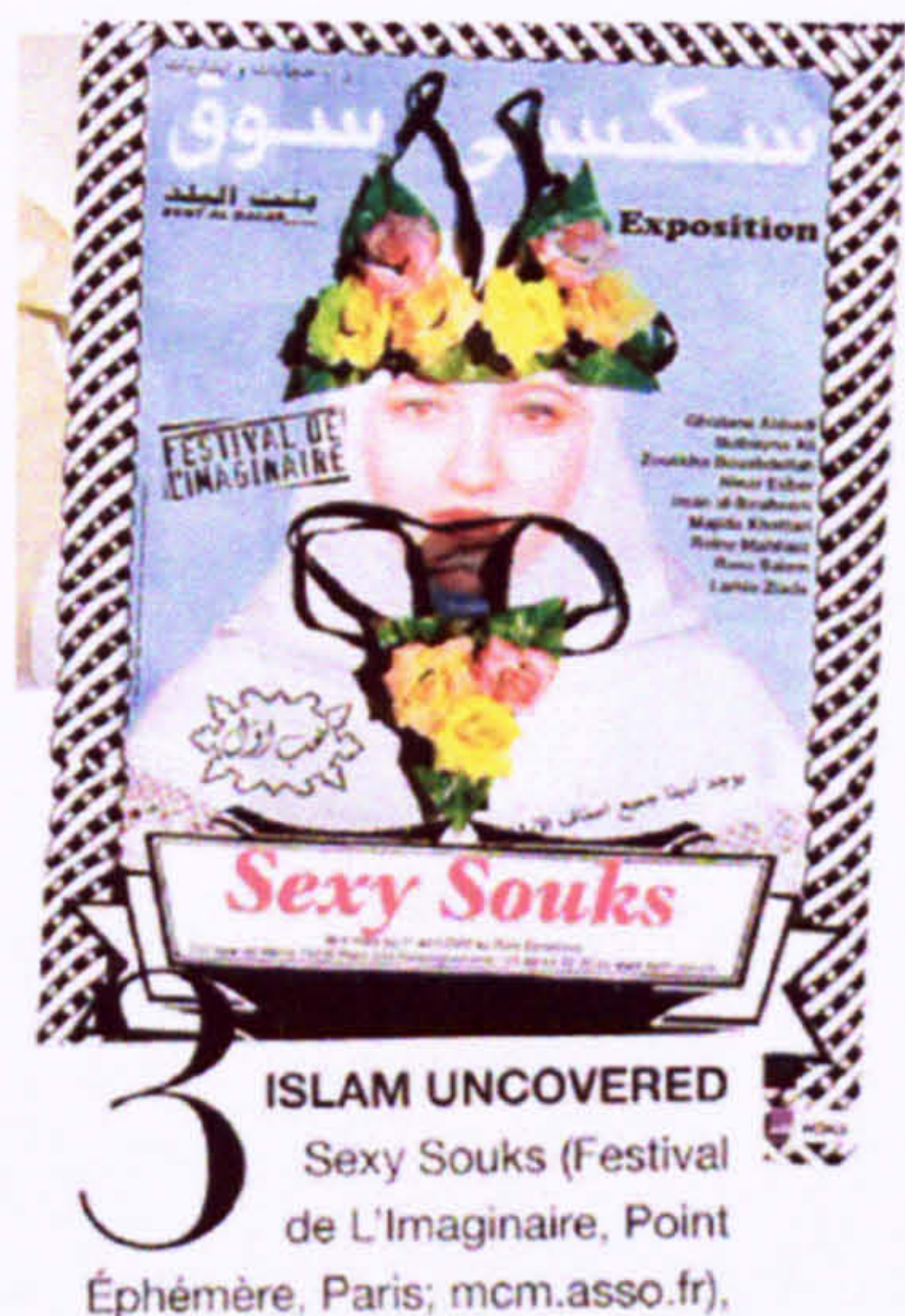


Figure 7.4 : *Sexy Souks* (2007)

<sup>1</sup> *Harper's Bazaar*, Dubai Edition, Issue 1, Volume 1, March 2007.



## APPENDIX D

### The Use of Girls as Substitutes for the *Muslim Female Subject*

During my interview with Mohammed Hassan Khoshnevis, his assistant Rana Javadi brought to my attention the way in which girls are used in advertising as substitutes for the *Muslim female subject* to avoid contravening modesty codes. She alerted me in particular to an advertisement for hair dye in the Iranian women's magazine, *Zanan* (2000) shown below (Figure 7.5). The practice of using young girls in this way is commented on by the Iranian artists Farhad Moshiri and Shirin Aliabadi in *Perverved Bastard Collage* (2002) (Figure 7.6). This work is part of the project *Freedom is Boring, Censorship is Fun* (2002-6) which, as mentioned in Chapter Three, is concerned with the evolution of censorship in Iran. In a private conversation, the artist Moshiri described *Perverved Bastard Collage* as follows: 'This work is made of 45 family magazine covers with young girls on the covers made up to look beautiful in the Western sense of the word. Editors use this sort of image constantly on the cover. They see it as a loophole, I saw it as perversion.'



Figure 7.5: *Zanan* (2006)



Figure 7.6: *Perverved Bastard Collage* (2002)



## APPENDIX E

### The '*Abāyah* in *Omino* Advertising

A magazine advertisement for the cleaning product Omino – 'liquid detergent for '*abāyahs*' – reveals a woman wearing a black *veil*. She is superimposed on a pile of folded garments, with a bottle of Omino showing a woman wearing a *veil* in the centre. A logo of a figure in a white shirt above the words '*Omino Bianco*' appears on the bottle and is repeated again on the bottom left-hand side of the image. The bottom right-hand side reveals graphics of a man in a white headdress and a woman in a *veil*. The text repeats the various attributes of Omino, stating that it can also be used for washing children's clothes, the *shmāgh* (men's headdress) and underwear (Figure 7.7). Interestingly, though the '*abāyah*' is central to the advertisement, it is not directly represented. Instead, women's dress is referred to through the head *veil* both on the bottle and the illustration. A black garment is shown amongst the folded clothes and whilst the '*abāyah*' is absent in this image it is nonetheless alluded to through the colour black.

In an analysis of soap-powders and detergents, Barthes contends that powders 'are selective, they push, they drive dirt through the texture of the object, their function is keeping public order not making war.'<sup>1</sup> He argues,

'Persil Whiteness' for instance, bases its prestige on the evidence of a result; it calls into play vanity, a social concern with appearances, by offering for comparison two objects, one which is whiter than the other. Advertisements for Omo also indicate the effect of the product ... but they chiefly reveal its mode of action.'<sup>2</sup>



In this context, whilst Omino offers no comparison between levels of 'whiteness,' the word 'Bianco' nonetheless necessitates that a reference to the colour white be made, herein manifested in the shirt worn by the figure in the logo and in the backdrop of the image. Whilst a white garment is revealed amongst the folded clothes, ironically, however, it is the colour black which dominates the advertisement for Omino Bianco. In his analysis, Barthes writes,

Powders ... are separating agents: their ideal role is to liberate the object from its circumstantial imperfection: dirt is 'forced out' and no longer killed; in the Omo imagery, dirt is a diminutive enemy, stunted and black, which takes to its heels from the fine immaculate linen at the sole threat of the judgement of Omo.<sup>3</sup>

Following this, therefore, a paradox is evinced in the seeming contradiction between the name Omino Bianco and the imagery of its advertisement. Whilst I draw on Barthes' argument in relation to 'the Omo imagery,' I am not concerned with a 'Western' model of advertising and its relation to the 'local,' thereby upholding dominant/local and external/internal binaries, but rather with the way in which the colour black is rendered unalterable within a context which demands that a reference to whiteness be made, hence Omino Bianco.<sup>4</sup> This example foregrounds the extent to which the colour black stands as a signifier for the *'abāyah*.





Figure 7.7: Omino Bianco (2004)

<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 37

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 36.



## APPENDIX F

### Fieldwork: Research and Interviews in Al-Riyadh, June 2005

#### 1. Excerpt from an interview with Halima Al-Shamry, fashion designer for the label *Fashion Top*, 4 June 2006.

The traditional '*abāyah* is no longer a national dress. It has become a reflection of a woman's personality and her perspective on life and on others around her. Moreover, now that '*abāyahs* are designed by well-known brand names, they have also become a mirror of a woman's social status, fine taste and quality of choice. Like other items in fashion, there is an '*abāyah* for every occasion, whether it's for school, work, special occasions, social events or family gatherings. The fashion these days is the loose '*abāyah*, as well as '*abāyahs* with fur trim at the neck, and other trims and additions.

Today, most women shy away from buying ready-made '*abāyahs*; they prefer the ones tailored to their tastes and exact sizes. They require a certain style, trim and their own choice of fabric. Tailored '*abāyahs* can cost anywhere from 1000 to 3000 Saudi riyals, with the most expensive ones originating from Saudi brand names. The fashion these days is *al-farāshah* [the butterfly], a loose '*abāyah* which is closer to *al-'abāyah al-shar'iyah*, where its length and width are the same, and it is non transparent ... while being *shar'iyah* at the same time, since it is wide and not tight. It can also double as a gown where a woman prefers to keep it on, instead of removing it when indoors.



Currently, *'abāyahs* have evolved in form and in colour to avoid uniformity, and to add a sense of individuality, as well as a form of avoiding the feeling that it is a socially imposed dress code. So we try to add style to an *'abāyah* to help woman accept it instead of her feeling that it is imposed. You might be a *muhajjabah* but your dress code follows fashion. Girls love fashion and are obsessed with it, so if you make them wear a traditional-looking *'abāyah*, they will get rid of it the first chance they get.

With reference to Saudi Arabian dress, Emirati dress or the Arab Gulf in general, the *'abāyah* should be distinctive because special attention is paid to it. It is not just worn out of an obligation to *sharī'a* that is, for *sitr*, but also for reasons such as customs and tradition, and is also considered as 'Fashion.' However, this is not the case with the *chador*, for example, since that is a traditional dress without any development. This is so because the *chador* is purely *sharī'a* (observing *sharī'a*) and so refers to those who we call '*multazimat*' (women strictly observing *sharī'a*). With us, it is not the case: all women must wear the *'abāyah*, whether they are doing it to observe *sharī'a* or not. So our *'abāyah* does not only refer to tradition and *sharī'a*; it refers to *sharī'a*, customs and tradition, it is a national dress, and it is fashion.

**2. Excerpt from a written correspondence with Saudi radio and television celebrity, Mariam Al-Ghamedi, 4 June 2006**

Dear Noor,

First, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation for choosing me as a pioneer and a witness to the changes taking place in the media in Saudi Arabia. I



have tried to contact some of the people who were at Jeddah Radio Channel at the time to verify the information I am about to share, but unfortunately there was very little documentation or archives during those times in either radio or television, perhaps because it was such an unusual thing (socially) at the time – it was an attempt to test the waters regarding women in the media. The issue remained vague for some time, and opinion was divided regarding the first women who worked in Saudi TV and Radio. But from my personal experience in the field, I can attest that the first female voice on Saudi Radio was Mrs Najdiyah Bint Ibrahim (cousin to Mr Jameel Al-Hujailan, the first Minister of Information), followed by Mrs Jeehan Al-Amawy, then Dr Fatina Shakir and Shireen Hamza Shahateh. Of the younger ladies at the same time, there was a group of girls, such as Hind Ali Shaikh and her sisters, Laila and Iman, Dalal Aziz Dhia', and others including myself. This was in late 1382H/1962.

As for television, women first appeared in drama shows in 1389H/1969 in a series entitled *Atqaa Abi Bakr*, in which ladies like Jawaher Banna and Laila Ali Shaikh acted; then in a show called *Mushkila wa Hall*, in which Jawaher Banna, Laila Ali Shaikh and myself participated. After my first appearance, the tribes were in uproar, as they totally objected to me acting, me being the only woman in the media who belonged to a tribe. As a result, a royal decree was issued banning the participation of Saudi women in drama, and limiting their participation to women's and children's programmes only; and this went on for several years. Saudi drama suffered from this lack of Saudi actresses, and producers fell back on using Arab and Gulf actresses in Saudi shows, until another royal decree was issued allowing the participation of



Saudi women in drama, but with many conditions and restrictions, the most important one being the approval of their guardian, and his presence on the set during shooting.

### **3. Interview with Mariam Al-Ghamedi, 6 June 2006**

Q. When was Saudi TV first established?

- 19.3.1385H / 17.7.1965

Q. How does Saudi TV compare with other channels?

- Saudi TV is governed by many factors making it unique and different from other channels. The first of these factors is the religious one, because Saudi Arabia is home to the two holy shrines, and the entire Islamic world looks to it in that way. Second is the social factor, since Saudi Arabia covers a large part of the Arab peninsula with both urban and tribal areas, each with its own culture and social identity. So what is acceptable to someone from an urban background can be totally unacceptable to someone from a rural or tribal background. Thus, Saudi Arabian TV attempts to cater to all backgrounds with programmes acceptable to everyone.

Q. Did the *Muslim female subject* go through several stages of visibility on Saudi Arabian TV?

- Because their first appearance was in drama shows, women's hair was not covered, and there were no preset guidelines or conditions on how she should appear, regarding either her hair or her clothing, as long as she kept the *tarhah* (head veil) on her head, and dressed appropriately as any Saudi Arabian woman. Women naturally followed those rules. Recently, when we



established the news channel Al-Ikhbariyah two years ago, and I was chosen as one of the presenters, we were instructed to wear full *hijāb*, with no hair showing, in order to avoid criticism, as it was the first time Saudi Arabian women were reading the news.

Q. What is the nature of clothing of non-Saudi Arabian women on Saudi Arabian channels?

- There is no difference between the clothing of Saudi Arabian women and non-Saudi Arabian women. The rules are the same for all women.

Q. What is your view regarding women appearing on TV?

- Women working in TV is the same as men. Each gender has its own message, which is conveyed through the various programmes. Women on TV started strong, till fanatic voices were strongly raised against this inside and outside. A coup attempt by Juhaiman and his group against the Saudi Arabian leadership, which failed to take over the holy shrine in Makkah in 1400H, had among its demands the prevention of female education, and appearance of women on TV or radio, and even banned songs on Saudi Arabian TV. Obviously Saudi Arabian TV did not meet their demands, but their influence was felt, as songs by females were stopped from being aired on TV, while families began to dissuade their daughters from joining TV or radio, as it was viewed to be anti-Islamic and against tradition. Currently, TV is undergoing noticeable changes, as more and more Saudi Arabian women are joining TV with the approval of the community.

Q. What is the difference between the Saudi Arabian vision and the Iranian vision?



- From my point of view, as a media person, I have witnessed many changes to women working in TV. I think the Iranian Revolution, with its stance, rigidity and prejudice against women working in TV without strict rules and guidelines, and dictated by a system of sectarian beliefs, has actually influenced the entire Islamic world. So, despite Saudi Arabia's moderate interpretation of Islam, the strict and excessive Iranian beliefs have influenced some Saudi Arabian teenagers and young men and they began to believe that this fanatical version of Islam is the real Islam. This resulted in terrorist activities which we faced in our society. We were totally unprepared for this, and they began to demand that we follow the example of Iranian women's *hijāb* on TV. In fact some of us received death threats to stop working on TV.

Q. What is Saudi Arabia's role in showing women on TV in their present appearance, and how has this affected the rest of the Islamic world?

- Saudi Arabian women have a unique religious and social identity, and until only recently have been the only women covering their hair on screen; whereas in the past, in some Arab and GCC channels, women were not allowed to wear head covers on TV, and so had to use female presenters from other Arab countries. Saudi Arabia on the other hand uses mostly Saudi Arabian presenters, or non-Saudi residents.

Q. What is the political and social influence of women appearing on TV?

- In the past, on Arab and GCC TV, women used to host programmes which focused on families and children. After proving their effectiveness they



began to host more and more cultural programmes and succeeded very noticeably. What they proved was that women were not only fit to be housewives or teachers, but that they could be just as successful in the cultural field, as journalists, writers and novelists. Women may be lagging behind in the political arena in the Arab world, but when they finally entered it they proved themselves, and as a result we see more and more women hosting political and cultural programmes on satellite TV.

Q. Many Arab channels do not reflect Islamic values and principles. How much influence do these channels have in shaping the identity of Muslim women?

- It is a real shame that the owners of some of these channels are Muslims. They have completely dropped their values and canceled their identities, and so their programmes are ugly clones of some Western commercial channels. Despite the fact that a lot of Western channels provide useful and serious programmes, our businessmen who have the financial means to sponsor useful programmes choose instead to sponsor other programmes which, as you said, do not reflect our Islamic values and principles. As for their influence, they obviously have a negative influence, especially on teenagers. If you just take a look at the scroll which spells out the SMS messages from the viewers you would be insulted and outraged, and you would realize how much effect these channels have had on many people; it's even affected their clothing and hair.



Q. TV presenter Muna Abu-Suleyman has become the centre of attention in the international media. What are the factors which have made her a symbol of Saudi Arabian women?

- Muna Abu-Suleyman made use of certain circumstances of being a co-host of *Kalām Nawā'im* (Sweet Talk), which is aired by MBC, one of the first Arabic satellite channels in the Arab world, although several channels have appeared since then. She has her international audience, and it didn't hurt that she had studied in the USA and is fluent in English, and has the full support of her family. She's also appeared during a time when the Western media have thrown their weight behind the image of Saudi Arabian women who have been denied their rights, and who have to fight in order to get them; and therefore any Saudi Arabian woman who appears in the media is a symbol of Saudi Arabian women. Muna is one example. Personally, I admire her, as she is distinct with her decent, yet elegant clothing. She is also gentle, calm, pretty and does not find it necessary to add make-up etc. I must mention here that being a symbol should be defined more clearly. Perhaps Muna is a symbol among a generation of women who found themselves in the limelight. However, there are a lot of Saudi Arabian women who have represented their gender for decades, and who have worked in silence, facing extreme odds and challenges without giving in to threats and objections. There are Saudi Arabian women who work in the United Nations and in Saudi Arabian embassies around the world, and others who have huge responsibilities and who shape decision-making and are considered movers and shakers in Saudi Arabia.



**4. Interview with Dr Abdul Aziz Al-Magushi, Editor-in-Chief of *Al-Riyadh*, 4 June 2006**

**Q. How does Saudi TV compare with other channels?**

- Any official satellite channel should be representative of the direction and orientation of the state and society it exists within and targets. This is achieved through a discursive and visual strategy which works in harmony with, responds to and supports such a direction and orientation. And that is what makes Saudi Arabian TV different from other channels. Besides being bound to its society in terms of suitability to its social and cultural spaces, Saudi Arabian TV comes from the same basis from which other official satellite channels spring in many Arab and Islamic countries. This is due to the similarity in the social, cultural and linguistic fabric of Arab and Islamic countries, keeping in mind the individuality of each society. In comparison, we see the difference between our channels and American or European channels, which obviously represent their own culture and vision.

**Q. What is your view regarding women appearing on TV?**

- Women are an integral part of any society. Because they are present in every aspect of life, it is natural to see them on TV, whether as a host of programme or a guest in it. There is no doubt that their visibility is important, especially if their appearance is ruled by the rules of decency, and not just as a marketing tool displaying her body to sell products.



Q. What is Saudi Arabia's role in showing women on TV in their present appearance, and how has this affected the rest of the Islamic world?

- There is no doubt that a Saudi Arabian citizen has his own cultural and social identity, which is reflected in the decency of clothing and appearance on the screen, as well as in all social activities. Saudi Arabian women and residents of Saudi Arabia who have preserved their *hijāb* and their decent clothing and have stayed away from mixing publicly with the opposite sex have gained a privacy which is encouraged by Islam. Observing decency on screen and in public life is no different from her carrying out her duties by announcing the news or hosting educational programmes and adhering to all *sharī'a* and professional laws. We can even say that Saudi Arabian women are the example which should be followed by other Arabs, since their demeanour is compatible with *sharī'a* law. Unfortunately, many Arab satellite channels continue to force their female presenters not to wear decent, Islamic clothing; in fact they have been dismissed without justification at times.

Q. What is the political and social influence of women appearing on TV?

- Anyone who puts himself in a position to challenge televised media must do so from a specific ideological and cultural reference or authority, which must feed into the messages which he wants to aim at his adult and young audiences. Some of these messages are desirable and attractive, while others are repulsive and divisive. A presenter's political or cultural orientation is not separate from this general concept. There is absolutely no room for



compromise on this with the excuse that a TV presenter's job requires her sometimes to use physical tools which are unacceptable.

Q. Many satellite channels are not representative of their Islamic identity, values or principles; for example, channels like LBC, and the way it presents women. How much influence do they have on the construction of Muslim women's identity?

- It is no secret how much influence the media message has on its target audience. There are many studies which revolve around this crucial issue. For instance, some studies have shown that some media corporations have been paying excessively high salaries – higher than those paid to university professors or other professions – all for the gifts and skills which these presenters possess and which in turn reinforce the corporation's agenda. It is no wonder then that we hear someone say: 'Give me a theatre and I will give you a nation.'

Certainly, some visual and written media, especially commercial ones, justify these means, however questionable, on grounds of commercial profit; however, the rigid censor mentality may not be of use in this case, although some sort of regulation is necessary. Furthermore, there should be a consensus for a gentleman's agreement in which all media outlets agree on maintaining a certain discourse with an appropriate 'appearance' for everyone working in the media whether government or commercial.



Q. Does Saudi Arabian TV have a plan to 'counter' channels which break the regulations followed by Saudi Arabian channels and which influence Muslim women?

- We do not carry a stick or a ruler to measure the morals of other channels. In my estimation, there are basics and absolutes which have demonstrated that they are essential standards in moral conduct, are universally agreed upon, and are far away from professional terms and conditions. Saudi Arabian TV does not see itself as a role model for others; this is a decision which is left up to the viewers. What is required is for official Arab and Muslim channels at least, which enter every home, to have some sort of gentleman's agreement to heighten decency in their programmes and in the presenters of these programmes, and to make them committed to a moderate, pioneering approach in choosing the content of these programmes, and in the medium used – and by medium I mean the programme presenters and whether they should be male or female. I believe that satellite channels which have a message for their own communities must not hesitate to adopt this gentleman's agreement.

It is worth noting that even in the West there are lawsuits and even pressure groups which are calling for more common decency and respect towards tastefulness. It is now common to see many channels refraining from broadcasting R-rated shows during peak times, or any time when the whole family is gathered. So Europeans are now more inclined towards elements which reinforce the social fabric, and are more careful about establishing a



media and discourse which supports this trend. We in turn, as part of a civilization which carries a healthy message should take the lead in the field of media awareness, and we must be more perceptive of the fact that its appearance dictates whether the audience will accept it or reject it.

In Saudi Arabia, there is no particular methodology or mechanism which governs studies regarding women working, especially in TV and radio. We are still in the beginnings, so there is a section in radio which supervises female presenters, as well as another one in television. Most women working in radio and television are non-Saudis, only 2 or 3 are Saudi Arabian; and the former were apparently raised in a more liberal environment, like on the western coast, Jeddah for instance, or the eastern zone and central Najd. In central Najd, women working in radio and TV was not a welcome practice.

**5. Interview with Dr Suleiman Al-Aidi, Director of Saudi Arabian Television, 3 June 2006**

**Q. When was Saudi Arabian TV first established?**

- Saudi Arabian TV was established in 1384H/1964. Both Riyadh and Jeddah channels were launched simultaneously.

**Q. How does Saudi TV compare with other channels?**

- Saudi Arabian TV possesses a policy which adheres to Saudi Arabia's policy, and which in turn adheres to the teachings of the *Qur-ān* and the *Sunnah*; therefore any programmes or shows which come out of Saudi Arabian TV have a proselytizing (*da'wa*) message – the foundation on which



Saudi Arabia was established. Other channels also produce programmes with a similar message, and there are channels which specialize in them like Al-Majd and Sharjah TV. By comparison, you probably mean: why is Saudi Arabian TV characterized by this? Well, there is a lot of liberality in the way women are being shown without Islamic *hijāb*. As an example, there is Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, Al-Hurra which use a version of *hijāb* which does not fulfil its purpose, which is to cover the hair and the adornments of a woman.

However, if you mean the difference between programmes, then there is a message which Saudi Arabian channels carry, while there are other messages carried by other channels. In Saudi Arabia, our message is an extension of our values and principles in the GCC. We aim to reinforce our national identity, disseminate Islamic *da'wa*, and entertain Saudi Arabian audiences and others through four different channels.

Q. Did the *Muslim female subject* go through several stages of appearance on TV, i.e. did her *veil* begin to recede and gradually show more and more hair; did her clothes gradually change from loose to tight or vice-versa?

- I assure you that women have not taken off their *veils* yet. Currently, while wearing her *hijāb* she tries hard to avoid showing any hair. On Saudi Arabian TV only the face shows, while the hair remains hidden; this is something which all our channels adhere to, and so women have followed it accordingly.



Q. How do non-Saudi Arabian women dress on Saudi Arabian TV?

- The dress code is the same on all Saudi Arabian channels. In fact, when we invite a non-Saudi Arabian guest, we notice that she is stricter with herself. It seems non-Saudi Arabian women have understood that Saudi Arabian TV does not allow make-up, and therein lies the danger, as we do not support this.

Q. What is your view regarding women appearing on TV?

- Women have had a programme on Saudi Arabian TV since 1977, which focuses on the family and children; all of this started in the eastern zone in Dammam and in Jeddah. This programme has not changed its method or message since then, and I really hope they would develop it. The programme is called *Woman and Society*, launched in 1487H/1967, and was the first programme to have women on TV. Lately, there have been more and more women's programmes, like the current programme, *Eve Debates*. In actuality, these programmes are 26–27 years old, but they have been revamped.

As for our view regarding women appearing on TV, we think she is carrying out her role side by side with men to serve the family and the child. I fully support programmes which aim to educate Saudi Arabian women and women who watch Saudi Arabian TV as their role is complementary to that of men in educating society.



Q. What is the difference between the Saudi Arabian vision and the Iranian vision?

- I don't think there is a vision for Saudi Arabia and another one for Iran; they follow the same basis, which is that women should dress decently and wear the *hijāb*. The only difference is that it chose a school which allows women to show their face and hands and that is their way of educating their women.

As for the political comparison, Iran has a different orientation, but we still share the same point of view, which is that women should not show their bodies or their faces. As for Saudi Arabia, it uses drama shows and programmes to educate its women, and I think we are aligned in our policy to follow Islamic *sharī'a*, which naturally governs women appearing on TV or not appearing. We believe that women should contribute to *da'wa* and to educating her family, her society and audiences in general.

Q. So what is the difference between Saudi Arabia and Iran? And why did the question surprise you?

- I don't really watch Iranian TV, so I cannot judge if their presenters wear Islamic *hijāb* according to *sharī'a* or not; but I think we are all aligned in our conviction against women being portrayed in a vulgar or tasteless way, or that she becomes a viewer only and watches shows which act outside the framework of Islamic *sharī'a*. This is my viewpoint, and it is closely connected to that of our brothers in the Republic of Iran.



Q. What is Saudi Arabia's role in showing women on TV in their present appearance, and how has this affected the rest of the Islamic world?

- We agree that women are always *veiled* on Saudi Arabian TV; and how does that influence the Islamic world? Without a doubt, it implies to female viewers that a Muslim woman has certain attributes; she never appears in a vulgar way, her face never shows and does not show her adornments, according to Islamic teachings.

Q. How popular are local Saudi Arabian satellite channels?

- The last GCC survey issued in early 2006 shows an increase in viewer numbers to 84%; we even won first prize for viewers, especially Saudi Arabian female viewers and GCC females who are loyal to our religious programmes. The survey shows that Saudi Arabian TV is watched from *maghrib* time (sunset) till 9:00 pm, due to the density of religious programmes and others which cater to society and women. Why women? Because women are viewers.

Q. Which programmes?

- Religious, educational programmes with Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawy, Salman Al-Oudah, Aayidh Al-Qarni, such shows have acquired a lot of popularity. So while we're hosting these personalities, we get the highest number of viewers, while other channels at that same time of evening, I think, are showing drama series.



Q. What is the comparison between Saudi Arabian channels and others like Iqra and Al-Risala?

- Iqra and Al-Risala are channels which specialize in Islamic *da'wa*. It is enough to call Saudi Arabian TV a satellite channel, while it is also religious at the same time because it is broadcast from both Makkah and Madīnah holy places. Iqra also links up with us and broadcasts the same thing from time to time, while Al-Risala has aired prayers from Makkah and Madīnah, so in reality they emulate us in our religious coverage. The only thing that sets them apart is that they have more specialized programmes; for instance, intensive *da'wa* programmes on Iqra and Al-Risala. Whereas in our case we consider everything as *da'wa*, like broadcasting the dawn prayer from the Makkah Mosque, *fatwā* programmes, women's educational programmes. The fact that women are dressed in Islamic dress and not just traditional makes these *da'wa* programmes in our eyes. In their case, they founded Iqra and Al-Risala to impress viewers that these channels are specialized. I do not agree with this kind of categorization, Islamic channel or so and so channel ... we have an Islamic mission which we carry out through our programmes under one motto: *Lā ilāha illa-lāh, Muhammad Rasūl Allāh*.

Q. Women do not appear on Al-Risala and Iqra?

- I've not watched Al-Risala; but Iqra does show women, and actually has programmes for women – I've even seen a programme on Iqra where a woman was issuing *fatwā*, but that was during the beginning, and they've stopped it now.



Q. Why?

- I expect that it was not accepted/popular, so they resorted to other *da'wa* programmes presented by men, because there is limited education among women in terms of *fatwā* in the Islamic world, but women have a big role to play, and I think those types of programmes would be good, if done properly.

Q. What is the political and social influence of women appearing on TV?

- So far I've not felt any kind of political influence from women's exposure on TV; this is mostly apparent in the fact that there was no representation of women in the *Majlis al-shūrā* (Consultative Council), but their opinion is sought in the press on both political and cultural issues. So they have had a role at a certain level, and there is a willingness to accept their participation, but it is not necessarily on TV or in the Council or in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Women do, however, contribute with their opinions and education and with suggestions which they offer to the *Majlis* or any other institution; but I have not noticed any considerable contribution on TV. Lately, we've hosted women from society who are more aware economically, culturally and socially. The influence I can think of is that it has given more boldness to women to appear on TV and participate in social, cultural and economic programmes.

Q. Have women contributed any change culturally?

- Without a doubt, women have played a role by providing space for airing women's opinions on TV or radio or even in the written media. As



mentioned earlier about sister Muna, women may contribute with their opinion by writing it and sending it to these programmes, not necessarily by physically appearing on them. So their role is clear.

**Q. Many satellite channels are not representative of their Islamic identity, values or principles; for example, channels like LBC, and the way it presents women. How much influence do they have on the construction of Muslim women's identity?**

- There is a danger in the way women are being represented, when Muslim women are shown in a somewhat vulgar way, whether on a magazine cover, paper or on TV; it demeans women by making her a piece of merchandise and manipulating her beauty, her thoughts or culture, and then marketing them through these channels. In truth, if this does not have an impact on our young generation today then it certainly will in the future.

**Q. How would it affect the generation?**

- In the future they will emulate them. Young women will watch these shows and compare themselves to them, and as we know exposing people to certain things repeatedly will result in imitation. And that has serious ramifications on the home in a Muslim society.

**Q. Does Saudi Arabian TV have a plan to 'counter' channels which break the regulations followed by Saudi Arabian channels and which influence Muslim women?**



- We do not have plans in that area, we can't say that we have plans regarding women working in TV. We have a religion and follow its teachings and implement them in our TV policy, and I think it will influence the future by preserving the Islamic identity of women, and I assure you that we've had a lot of very positive feedback because we have stuck to our principles, and many women have given us their support and have thanked us.

Q. TV presenter Muna Abu-Suleyman has become the centre of attention in the international media. What are the factors which have made her a symbol of Saudi Arabian women?

- The main factor about Muna is that she adds a cultural dimension and has a knack for dialogue and a boldness about the issues she introduces. She gives the impression that she has a mission, and that she has a society which supports her. And so people have looked at her and asked, is she a Saudi Arabian woman? Absolutely Muna Abu-Suleyman does not represent all of Saudi Arabian society, but she does represent samples of Saudi Arabian society.

Q. Can she appear on Saudi Arabian TV?

- Yes she can, but under certain conditions.

Q. What conditions?

- She should wear a *hijāb*.



Q. But she does wear a *hijāb*.

- Sometimes when adornments are obvious, in her bosoms or on her face, those are not acceptable.

Q. But she considers herself *muhajjabah*.

- In her view, and in the way she understands *hijāb* she can say she is *muhajjabah*, and you've already established that a *hijāb* requires hair and adornments to be hidden.

Q. What do you mean by adornments?

- Make-up and things which prove that a woman is marketing herself to the viewer. Women are generally beautiful and elegant; their natural faces are acceptable, and that's how I see women. But if she adds make-up and other tools of adornment ... and so I urge our fellow female presenters to follow the way of nature and not add make-up and other facial adornments to attract viewers' attention.

You seem to be a fan of Muna Abu-Suleyman.

Q. I'm not a fan, but I don't see other Saudi Arabian women on TV so I'm asking.

- There are Saudi Arabian presenters in the Eastern Zone, there is Ikhlas Al-Ansari, and she is very good in her observance and knowledge. And in Riyadh there are other Saudi Arabian sisters like Hanaa Bakali and Mariam Al-Ghamedi.



Q. What do you think of Mariam Al-Ghamedi?

- She is a Saudi Arabian woman who is *muhajjabah* on screen, but her education precedes her, as she is older, but used to perform in drama, and gave something to the viewers, and she has done her part and represented a Saudi Arabian woman.

Q. So what is the difference between Mariam Al-Ghamedi and Muna Abu-Suleyman in terms of clothing and *hijāb*?

- I didn't focus on Muna. Mariam is mature, while Muna is young, so there is an age difference between the two women, Mariam who is in her fifties and Muna who is 25–30 years old, but she is educated and mature too, and I am not questioning her modesty; I am just worried that she would present herself as a Saudi Arabian in a different way, which is what...

Q. Scares you?

- I'm not scared, on the contrary; it will tell us whether what we or she are doing is right or wrong.

Q. How do you explain her popularity?

- She has popularity through satellite channels, but that is totally not representative of Saudi Arabian society. A woman does not represent Saudi Arabian society, she represents herself and her vision that this is a *hijāb* and it ends there.



Q. Do you consider her a rebel?

- She is somewhere between Mariam Al-Ghamedi and Ikhlas Al-Ansari, and is not a rebel as you say; but she is a familiar face to the viewers, and I hope this does not give her justification to say that this is a *hijāb*, whereas what she is presenting to the viewers is not an Islamic *hijāb*.

Q. Why is her *hijāb* not considered an Islamic *hijāb*?

- Because the way she flirts is unacceptable in Islam (*be not too complacent of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire – Al-Ahzāb – 33:32*). So a change in style and performance may gain some kind of ... she wants to show herself.

Q. Does she flirt?

- I am afraid to say that, because I don't actually follow her show, nor do I focus on her mission on TV.

Q. Did you ever ask Muna Abu-Suleyman if she saw herself as a rebel?

- Yes, I did ask her, and she said that she was a rebel ideologically in the cultural sense, not in the Islamic sense.

Q. What is the difference between culture and Islam?

- Muna says that her culture is a national Saudi Arabian one and she raises questions about the *Majlis* and about the government. In other words, her thinking helps her ask questions on *sharī'a*. A presenter is usually inclined



towards what he knows and is passionate about, so if he is uneducated in *sharī'a* matters he doesn't get into those subjects, and when he is not inclined towards art or songs then he stays away from those shows. If they are cultural issues, simply social culture (what they call human interest), like investigative reports and interviews, most presenters actually succeed in that without exception. Muna has succeeded in that. As for specialized subjects, she didn't succeed, like *sharī'a*, as that is a subject which takes stages and years of exposure, especially if it relies on education. Any presenter who lacks education in a certain subject should not specialize in it, but Muna wants to go into everything. The most successful and easiest programmes are talk shows, and so 90% of presenters gravitate towards them. But a talk show for an hour with an educated man like Dr Abdulla Al-Ghuthami would be a joke if it was with an uneducated host; the same goes for people like Dr Salman Al-Oudah or Dr Yusuf Al-Qaradawy, who are internationally famous specialists in *sharī'a* law. In that case, the presenter must study the life of the Sheikh, his publications and ideology, so that he is able to have an educated dialogue, otherwise he is not considered a specialized presenter.

Q. Is Muna Abu-Suleyman's iconicity rather post-national, since it signifies more of an Islamic iconicity as opposed to a national one?

- That is a question for her, I must decline to answer it, because I don't recognize national identities in the first place. If I were to be asked what an identity is, it would be a Muslim woman with an Islamic culture. National identity is another line entirely, recognized by some intellectuals. As for me,



I stop at this title ‘national identity,’ as we have gone beyond calling for nationalism and Pan-Arabism to what is higher and more educated, which is the symbol of Muslim women and rational man.

Q. You’ve answered about nationalism but not about Muna.

- I’ve no business with Ms Muna, she can categorize herself as she sees fit.

Q. I suppose the construction of female visibility within national discourse in the case of Saudi Arabia is inherently Islamic. How does this construction – of woman on screen – relate to the greater ideological framework of global Islamic leadership, established in 1979, within Saudi Arabia?

- It was 1980 not 1979, and it is not considered a significant date for the Saudi Arabian viewer, and for women it wasn’t a significant date where changes happened. All it did was make us aware that there was a group of people who went against our rulers and deserved what it got from Allāh, because they transgressed on the Holy Mosque, and made a very poor choice for their confrontation, which is why the eyes of the whole world were turned towards Saudi Arabia. Our society has two currents, a closed one and an open one, the one you call ‘change’; but I am sure that rational people around the Muslim world in general and in Saudi Arabia in particular consider it an ordinary date. I was about 25 at the time, and it changed nothing in my Islamic identity, which remained solid, and I maintained my loyalty and patriotism; the events did not change anything in my mindset, I consider them troublemakers in Saudi Arabia.



Q. But they established a leadership...

- This leadership died in its cradle. This deviant, lost group, it only took a few months and then ended. All religious leaders in the Islamic world in Makkah, under the leadership of then King Khalid, issued a decision that this group broke away and strayed from the legitimate leadership, and must be punished, and ended without establishing anything.

Q. Exactly who was vengeful and hateful?

- Anyone who maintains Islamic *sharī'a* challenges infidel governments, and governments which have shown animosity towards the Islamic world, especially in the West where they don't want any progress to take place among Muslims or that we become unified, or act as one family, like in the GCC.

Q. We're one family?

- Absolutely! We're one family. Anyone who doubts this is deluding himself, even if some people don't view us in that way, they will soon find themselves part of one family; as an example you've only to look at Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, praise to Allāh. You saw Kuwaiti culture before and after the invasion. When Kuwait was invaded, the Kuwaitis fled to the UAE and the UAE embraced them as brothers, and the same happened in Saudi Arabia. Before that day everyone was for himself; and yet we remain one society whether others liked it or not.



Most members of society don't want programmes for women; but the reality which this channel lives is that women have always been there; and any society which lacks women's contributions is half-paralyzed, whether in its culture or life. You know what they say, women are the other lung in the body.



## APPENDIX G

### Film Synopses

#### ***Pépé Le Moko*, Julien Duvivier (1937)**

*Pépé Le Moko* is the story of the eponymous Pépé, a French criminal in hiding from the police in the Casbah, the Arab quarter of Algiers, with his gypsy lover, Inès. After evading the police once again, Pépé runs into the glamorous Gaby. They meet on several occasions, provoking Inès into a jealous passion. When one day Pépé's protégé, Pierrot, is betrayed by Régis and arrested, Pépé and his gang kill the traitor. He then tries to escape towards the harbour but is stopped by Inès. Pépé and Gaby meet again whilst Slimane, a devious inhabitant of the Casbah, spies on them. Waiting for Gaby to show up the next day, Pépé discovers that she is leaving for France. He runs towards the harbour but is apprehended before the ship leaves. Slimane and the jealous Inès are responsible for his capture and they encounter each other by the harbour whilst he is handcuffed. Desperate, Pépé mortally wounds himself as he looks out towards the departing ship. The film ends with an image of Gaby on the deck, gazing upon the Casbah before turning away.

#### ***The Battle of Algiers*, Gillo Pontecorvo (1966)**

Told mostly in flashback, *The Battle of Algiers* presents the reminiscences of the now captive Ali La Pointe, a prominent member of the Algerian Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), of his struggle against the colonial government. A former petty thief Ali joined the FLN three years previously to fight the French and cleanse the



Casbah of the corruption believed to stem from the occupation. The film follows the rebels' struggle and the increasingly violent methods used by the French forces, led by the brutal police chief of Algiers, Col. Mathieu, to put down the resistance before it escalates into a national revolution. After the flashback, Ali and the last of the FLN leaders are killed, and the film follows the growing campaign of resistance that culminates in the declaration of Algerian independence in 1962.

***Nargess*, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad (1992)**

(Synopsis provided by BFI)

Nargess combines the conventions of the gangster genre with the tale of an unusual love triangle. Afagh is an aging thief who has lost the attractiveness of her youth and is in danger of losing her lover, Adel. Unfortunately for Afagh, Adel has met Nargess, the beautiful young daughter of poor, noble parents, and decided to leave the life of crime to be with her, but not until he pulls off one last job.

***Through the Olive Trees*, Abbas Kiarostami (1994)**

(Synopsis provided by Artificial Eye)

When a film crew arrives in an earthquake-devastated village to shoot a film, Hossein, a young, homeless and illiterate bricklayer, is given a small role and is amazed to find himself cast as the newly-wed husband of the girl he adores, the sulky Tehereh.



Although his previous offers of marriage have been refused, Hossein takes advantage of their newly enforced proximity on-set to persist with his dream to make Teherah his real wife.

***The Apple*, Samira Makhmalbaf (1997)**

(Synopsis provided by Artificial Eye)

Based on a true incident and featuring the family involved, the film tells a bizarre yet engaging story. In Tehran, twin sisters live as virtual prisoners of their poor father and blind mother, locked behind bars for all of their twelve years. Their father argues that his daughters 'are like flowers. They mustn't be exposed to the sun or they will soon fade...' A social worker attempts to persuade him to give them the freedom to explore the world beyond the gates of their home.

***The Day I Became A Woman*, Marziyeh Meshkini (2000)**

(Synopsis provided by Artificial Eye)

The film looks at three generations of women in three episodes. The first episode tells the story of Hava, a little girl coming up to the age of nine. On the morning of her birthday, her mother reminds her that, now she is a woman, it would be a sin for her to go out of the house. The little girl won't take it and insists, crying. Her grandmother points out that Hava was born at midday and so to let her go out for a few hours. This is the only way Hava can say a sad and final farewell to her friends.



The second episode focuses on a girls' cycling race. Ahoo, the girl leading the way, is continually being chased by her relatives, who remind her, more and more threateningly, that if she continues this simple pastime she will be thrown out of the house. She ignores them and continues to race, but in the end is forced to give up.

The third episode starts out in an airport concourse where an old woman, confined to a wheelchair, makes her way through to buy everything she has never been able to have in her life: refrigerators, television sets, dishwashers, iron, etc. She will have them taken to a beach which is to become her final, perfect home.

***Kandahar*, Mohsen Makhmalbaf (2000)**

(Synopsis provided by BFI)

Nafas, an exiled Afghan journalist, flies to the Afghanistan-Iran border. Recording her thoughts on a portable tape recorder, she reveals that she is to go to Kandahar where her sister, unable to bear Taliban rule, has threatened suicide at the eclipse in three days.

At a refugee camp, tribal families prepare to return to Afghanistan. An old man agrees to take Nafas across the border into Afghanistan posing as his fourth wife. When they stop to eat, the old man chastises Nafas for showing her face. Continuing their journey, the group is robbed by bandits.



In a village madrassa (religious school), a mullah makes young boys chant the *Qur-ān*; he expels one boy, Khak, for failing to recite a passage from the *Qur-ān* properly. The old man tells Nafas his family are returning to Iran so she hires Khak to guide her to Kandahar. En route Khak discovers a skeleton with a ring on its finger which he tries to sell to Nafas.

In the next village a woman consults the doctor, Tabib Sahib, each seated on opposite sides of a screen, her small daughter acting as intermediary. Nafas, now sick, consults Sahib and discovers that he speaks English, and is originally from the US (he came to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviets). He offers to take her part of the way, insisting she send Khak home.

At a Red Cross station, landmine victims clamour for artificial limbs. A helicopter drops supplies and amputees dash across the desert on crutches to collect the limbs. Sahib cannot enter Kandahar but persuades a one-armed amputee, Hayat, to accompany Nafas. Fearing for his safety, Hayat disguises himself as a woman. The two join a bride and her wedding group, only to be stopped by Taliban who have them searched, confiscating a book and a stringed musical instrument. Nafas and Hayat are detained with others.

**10, Abbas Kiarostami (2002)**

(Synopsis provided by ICA Projects)



Focusing tightly on a driver and her passengers, the film opens on an incredible exchange with her young son, the very model of burgeoning masculinity. The driver and her passengers argue, joke, cajole and console one another through the course of ten brief journeys. The driver encounters the full range of female Iranian experience, sharing views with an elderly woman on her way to prayer, a young woman of her own age who is dealing with the trials of love, as well as a very vocal prostitute. All of this runs parallel to her experience as a divorced woman and mother trying to deal with the aggression she encounters from both her ex-husband as well as her son as she attempts to achieve her own form of personal freedom.

***At Five in the Afternoon, Samira Makhmalbaf (2003)***

(Synopsis provided by Artificial Eye)

Set in the ruined city of Kabul, it tells the story of Noqreh, a young woman eager to take advantage of the new freedoms and opportunities afforded to women. Despite her father's wishes that she receive only a traditional religious education, Noqreh also attends a secular school for girls, where she is inspired by the idea of becoming Afghanistan's first woman President. But the harsh reality of survival in a country devastated by war threaten her dreams and aspirations.



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